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DISPARITY OF ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL BANGLADESH: BOURDIEU'S PERSPECTIVES

Md. Tariqul Islam
M. Phil Researcher, Bangladesh University of Professionals
Mirpur Cantonment, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: tareque1420@gmail.com

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Abstract

English is a compulsory subject up to higher secondary level in the national curriculum of Bangladesh. This policy is based on the principle of social equality because the opportunity of learning English is kept open to all irrespective of social class, religion or geographic location. However, not all students across the country have the same sort of support, resources and opportunities for learning English or for reaping its benefits. Most of the rural students are underprivileged and deprived in this regard. Yet they have to appear at the same national examination as students from all over the country. The result is, as can be expected, many of them turn out as failed students. Those who pass cannot take the venture of higher education due to their very poor knowledge in English. The presence of English friendly environment and improved socio-cultural framework of metropolitan centers ensure easy teaching-learning in urban areas of Bangladesh, particularly in the capital city. The scenario of English teaching-learning in urban areas does not reflect the sociolinguistic reality of English learning in rural Bangladesh. So, the present study is intended to understand the urban-rural gaps in socio-economic conditions, community resources and support, situations of teaching and learning of English, vitality of English in social surroundings and family resources for education.

Keywords: *Bourdieu, disparity, rural, theory of capital, urban*

1. Introduction

Equal educational opportunity is the fundamental right of every citizen of the country. According to the Article 15 and 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, education is a fundamental right and providing education to all its citizens is one of the responsibilities of the state. This has also been emphasized in the national education policy-2010 (Ferdaush, 2011). Despite various efforts of the Government, inequality in educational facilities in rural and urban area has appeared as a major barrier in achieving proper education for the students of rural Bangladesh. The gap between rural and urban area in regards to providing quality education is increasing day by day. As a result, rural students are facing difficulties in obtaining competitive education. The lack of education may force the poor households to engage in less productivity actions, which result in poverty. On the other hand, poverty leads to low investment in education (Rezvi, 2017).

The English language has been viewed as a tool for progress and development since the early days of British colonization and the subsequent spread of English and English education in colonized and decolonized territories (Pennycook, 1994). As Kachru (2009) is often quoted as saying, knowing English is like possessing Aladdin's lamp, which can bring material prosperity by ensuring one's access to education, international business, science and technology. Although Bangladesh has achieved a good progress in basic education over the past decade, the overall situation of various education related indicators is not satisfactory (Rezvi, 2017). The government

has been spending good amount on education sector. Despite the fact, little progress has been notified in teaching learning of English in rural Bangladesh over the years. Additionally, there have been problems of inequality and access.

2. Objectives

The study looks into the facets of English teaching-learning in rural Bangladesh through the lens of the 'Theory of Capital' of famous French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. This study on disparity in English teaching and learning of rural Bangladesh is an attempt to understand various inequalities in the context of rural education and to make a reality check in the promises stated in the National Education Policy (NEP, 2010), so that we can have a clear image to generate evidence and insights which can be used to formulate policy. In doing so, the famous theory of capital by Pierre Bourdieu has been used as a lens to look into the disparity which may have a long term effect on the greater mass of rural population in Bangladesh as a whole.

3. Methodology

The study utilized a mixed method paradigm employing questionnaire, interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and classroom observations. In doing so, the researcher has chosen four urban schools at Dhaka city and eight rural Schools of Barisal District through random sampling. The study has also analyzed the related literatures for qualitative comparison between the existing English teaching-learning in the selected urban and rural schools.

4. Literature Review

There have been some studies on social and cultural reproduction, Sociology of language learning, school as an arena for activating cultural capital (Azaola, 2012, Hamid, 2009 & Unn-Doris, 2005) and they have focused on the issues either partially or in a piecemeal treatment. On the other hand, another study (Mohamed, 2014) analyzed the English language as a cultural capital. The study (Ferdaush, 2011) provides a picture of inequality of primary education of Bangladesh. A few studies (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu and Nice, 1993 & Bourdieu, 1991) focused on the Bourdieu's theories of Capital and its implication in our social world but none of them present any in-depth analysis of disparity of teaching –learning of English in rural Bangladesh in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital. The present body of literature on disparity in teaching-learning of English at rural area is too scanty which does not allow taking any formative measures. This has necessitated a comprehensive study on the disparity of English teaching-learning in rural Bangladesh through the lens of famous sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

5. Bourdieu's 'Theory of Capital': An Appraisal

In accordance with famous French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930), Capital is the currency that buys you the higher position in the social structure. It is the foundation of social life and it is what decides your role in the social world. There are three main types of capital such as:

5.1. Cultural Capital

Cultural capital can be described as what we have and what we know. Bourdieu divided Cultural capital further into three sub-types (Bourdieu, 1986).

5.1.1 Embodied Cultural Capital

It is the qualities of mind or body. In other words, it is the form of knowledge that resides within us. This includes the things like the skills we have, our accent, dialect and mannerism. It also includes our taste and posture. Embodied cultural capital is important because more powerful social classes tend to differential themselves from others by how they look and behave. Therefore, we essentially need to buy membership into these classes with embodied social capital. In the UK, for example, people with posh accent traditionally have higher social prestige because that accent is associated with power, money and influence.

5.1.2 Objectified Cultural Capital

Objectified Capital is our material belongings that have cultural significance. In other way, it is the material objects we use to indicate social class. For example, a very luxurious car such as Mercedes usually gives a lot of objectified capital in society.

5.1.3 Institutionalized Cultural Capital

Institutionalized cultural capital is the symbol of cultural competence and authority, credentials and qualifications. It is the capital for which society values us basing on our degree. University degrees are powerful form of institutionalized cultural capital. The matter is: where you went and how you got the degree. However, the more prestige of a university you went to or will go to in future, the more institutionalized cultural capital you received or you will receive.

5.2 Social Capital

If Cultural Capital is what we know, and what we have, social capital is who we know. Our amount of social capital depends on our social network (Bourdieu, 1986). We gain social capital in two different ways: by being connected to a lot of people or by having connections with a few people who have a lot of capital, in other words, being connected to a smaller amount of people who have more power. Basically, our social relationship gives us the social capital.

5.3 Economic Capital

Economic capital is the money or assets that can immediately or directly be converted into money (Bourdieu, 1986). It should also be noted that economic capital is considered to be the most important species of capital in the world. This is because economic capital can be transformed into other forms of capital over time.

6. Findings: Rural English Teaching and Learning through Bourdieu's Lens

6.1. The Impact of Family

The family is the densest social network that a child is a part of. Within this network, children are both directly and indirectly affected by its members (Dumais, 2010). A child should benefit from the present family form. An urban student, who is from a wealthy family, inherits the social, cultural and economic capital right from his/her birth. However, it takes time for that capital to be transferred to her/him. His/her family member spends time to make sure he/ she gains cultural capital including attaining the fine arts and fine music, etc. The parents use economic capital, their money, to give him/her additional lessons like language lessons which substantially increase the cultural capital. The parents also ensure better schooling facilities for their children which gives them long term benefit like embodied cultural capital. It also gives skills to them which are more importantly validated by institutionalized cultural capital/credentials. From this we can clearly understand how cycle of capital works in favor of an urban student. On the other hand, a rural student lacks all those support from family for his/her poor background. A Rural student mostly lives in poverty; many of the rural students need to work daily to support their family to meet up the daily expenditure (Islam, 2018). Their parents also expect their support for the daily work. They face difficulty in studying, let alone getting support from the family. The result of this situation is lower exam results, i.e. lower GPA which impacts on college decision/ higher education. As a result, inequality and gap between a rural and urban student starts increasing from the very beginning.

6.2. The Quality of School

The quality of school plays a fundamental role in the socialization of norms and the development of cultural and social capital in all societies (Bourdieu, 1991). The school tremendously aids the child's accessibility and mobilization of social capital, perhaps acting as a buffer against the increasing 'openness' of the family and non-family networks that the child is a part of. Of all the factors outside the family networks, school has the strongest link to the child (Hamid, 2009). The study found that the students of government/private schools in towns show

good performance in English, while the school/ madrasa in rural area fail to implement the English curriculum and text books due to many interrelated reasons. Almost all government-run secondary schools are located in town areas and their physical infrastructure, quality of teachers and teaching facilities are better. The private schools in town areas come next in quality of education. Madrasas in town areas come in third position. The rural schools/ madrasas have come in fourth position in terms of result, infrastructure and other facilities (Ferdaush, 2011). The researcher identifies that the inequality among educational institutions prevails according to their type and location (Hamid, 2009). A small minority of students in the country, mostly in urban area, have the opportunity to attend good educational institutions. While FGD, the lack of facilities for the implementation of the English curriculum in rural schools was found as one of the major causes for poor quality English teaching –learning in rural Bangladesh.

6.3. The Quality of Teacher

Interaction and friendships are to be encouraged by the school through mandatory participation in extracurricular activities. Teachers need to understand the importance of building strong friendships for children, so they enact formal and informal programs that foster such relations. Thereby, students acquire cultural and social capital from their schools and surrounding personalities like teachers, other guardians and friends, etc (Azaola, 2012). While FGD and interview, this trend of interaction and friendships was found quite evidently missing in the rural schools where teachers' role is very important. Poor quality, insufficient knowledge and lack of social and cultural capital of the rural teachers are responsible for it. On the contrary, students in urban schools are quite friendly with their teachers which foster such interactions. While FGD, many opined that the English teachers at these rural schools are untrained and they are unaware of the current trends and techniques of ELT (Mohamed, 2014). It was found while interviewing with Headmasters that only one or two teachers in a school can prepare the digital content to teach the students by PowerPoint presentations. It was found that 8 teachers out of 20 who taught Science/Bengali/other subjects at school for 10 years became an English Teacher later (Islam, 2018). Definitely, these teachers make English as a nightmare to the rural students.

6.4. The Material Resources

There is no library at most of the rural schools or in the community from where books can be borrowed. Only 01 out of 10 Schools has the facility of a small scale computer lab, named 'Sheikh Rasel Digital lab'. The books, instruments and technologies are insufficient for teaching-learning of English in rural Bangladesh (Islam, 2018).The lack of Study desk at home indirectly indicates the possession of economic capital by the family. It is considered cultural capital because it represents an essential aspect of infrastructure for academic engagement at home (Kachru, 2009). The study found that the students' possession of English books and other English learning resources, including dictionaries, grammar books and other practice materials, English newspapers and magazines was very rare in rural Bangladesh. Television and computer with internet access in all the urban homes are an advantage because students can watch different English programs such as news, movies and documents. On the other hand, many of the rural homes do not have these facilities even now.

6.5. Parental Education and Economic Condition

Parental education is a major source of children's cultural capital. The study found almost 74% of the parents in the rural area were less educated. A major portion of the parents are farmers, day laborers, fishermen, local businessmen, carpenters, and shopkeepers (Islam, 2018). Parental occupation is a major source of family economic capital from which children's educational expenses are met (Richardson, 1986). On the other hand, the rate of educated parents is very high in urban area of the country. In urban schools, parents periodically communicate and get themselves involved with the teachers for their children's better education. Moreover, higher status children obtain a general cultural knowledge from their parents that give them an advantage in the school setting (Mohamed, 2014).The study identified a sharp disparity in the family income

of the parents between rural and urban areas. The family income of rural parents doesn't have any match with the urban parents. Still 23.2 percent of the population of Bangladesh is living under the poverty line (Rezvi, 2017). Most of them are living in the rural area. Education expenditure per month provides a direct and more reliable measure of economic investment in children's education. Monthly education expenditure includes expenses on tuition, paying for private tutoring, if any, buying educational resources and equipment, and other essential student needs. Many rural parents are not directly involved in children's education at home and even the parents do not consider themselves responsive to their children's long-term and short-term educational needs, such as appointing private tutors and buying educational supplies when required (Unn-Doris, 2005). As a result, the disparity increases between rural and urban English teaching and learning.

7. The Community

Community participation has a positive effect on a child's social capital. Community is the potential sources of social capital which are never realized (Richardson, 1986). Children can form social capital directly through their own community involvement, or indirectly through the involvement of their family, teachers, other adults, or friends (Bourdieu, 1997). An urban student gets a higher status community where he/she gains social and cultural capital. On the contrary, a rural student also has a community which cannot enhance the cultural and social capital as most of the people of that community are less educated.

8. Motivation in Learning English

Many students lose motivation to continue learning English in rural schools. Some students have no interest in English, do not want to learn English and even some students began to give up (Ferdaush, 2011).The study found that rural students did not have the scope to speak in English in their family or school or community. As a result, they never understand their level of English efficiency. Gradually they lack confidence in speaking English and loose motivation to learn (Dumais, 2010). On the contrary, urban students get all the structural facilities of family, school and community to speak and listen to the English language and get the strong motivation to learn English. This linguistic aspect of cultural capital assessed the extent to which individual learners can use English at home and/or discuss English lessons with their parents, siblings or any other family members, which may result in positive outcomes (Dumais, 2010).

9. Conclusion

The result of this study not only determines the socio-economic factors effecting unequal English teaching-learning but also suggests where the priority should be given for solving the backdrops of disparity between rural and urban students in English teaching-learning. Various structural reasons like educational institutions, socio-economic and religious tradition, geographic location and community, etc. have a major impact on ensuring equal English teaching-learning infrastructure/ opportunity for rural students in Bangladesh. Operational and structural reformation by the Government of Bangladesh should involve the beneficiaries of English teaching-learning of rural Bangladesh by managing school activities, quality of teachers, infrastructural and other facilities. Policies should be targeted towards mitigating the disparity in English learning of rural students. The government needs to attempt to take stronger measures for revising and renewing existing strategies. Otherwise, the aim of achieving universal education in this era of globalization might be elusive.

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