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EFL Teachers' Pedagogical Challenges at the HSC Level in Bangladesh: Classroom Environment Perspective

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Abstract: Pedagogy is the combination of knowledge and skills for effective teaching in the classroom. There are a number of pedagogical challenges at every level of education in each context. The current study aimed at investigating the pedagogical challenges faced by the EFL teachers related to the classroom environment at the HSC level in Bangladesh. A mixed-method approach was applied to conduct the study. The data collection procedure involved a questionnaire survey from ten HSC-level EFL teachers and classroom observation from five institutions of Dhaka City. Findings revealed that teachers mostly faced challenges regarding class size, class duration, seating furniture, technology and internet, students' irregularity, students' mixed ability and weather issues. This study suggested that sufficient teacher training and necessary support from respective authorities can eliminate the classroom-related pedagogical challenges faced by the EFL teachers at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

Keywords: HSC, Pedagogy, Challenge, EFL, Classroom Environment

Introduction

Teacher and pedagogy are inseparable. All sorts of training and classroom teaching depend on pedagogy. Pedagogy is the teaching profession as well as it is a science of teaching. It is the combination of knowledge and skills for effective teaching in the classroom. English, being an international language, has gained great importance at all levels of education in Bangladesh. However, English is still a foreign language in the Bangladesh context and teachers of this language at this level likely face innumerable pedagogical challenges. Hence, the term 'Pedagogical Challenges', has become the key component of the present study. According to Shurovi (2014), language planners, policy makers, linguists, and practitioners faced challenges of drafting practical language polices and workable implementation plans for language-in-education programmes aiming to promote individuals' social and professional development. Some other research studies provide the researcher with a steady accumulation of knowledge about the nature of teaching English in different countries and in different contexts showing numerous challenges related to approaches, methods and techniques in teaching English (Wu, 2011; Ahmad, 2013; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Hegde & Tungesh, 2017). Some researchers found that different materials were not helpful in teaching English in different settings (Moparthi, 2017; Hadi, 2014; Tsou, 2005). The English language, as an inevitable vehicle of communication, dominates every corner of the world with such a force that it has now become almost impossible to ignore its importance and significance in our practical life (Gupta, 2005). Teaching English has been established as a professional and academic field at all levels, especially at the HSC level. All the public

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and private colleges in Bangladesh have emphasized teaching and learning the English language to a great extent (Karim et al., 2019). However, research shows that many students lack competency in English language skills, resulting in failure in professional life. Though the Ministry of Education and other educational authorities have already taken different initiatives to improve the English language teaching and learning condition at the HSC level of education in Bangladesh, there are many constraints to the teaching and learning process of English. Specifically, teachers face different types of challenges while teaching English at the HSC level, and the students also encounter different challenges when learning English in the classrooms (Karim et al., 2020). Generally, teachers face problems regarding classroom size and teaching-learning environment, students' background knowledge, etc. So, it is important to examine the pedagogical challenges faced by the teachers when teaching English at the HSC level.

Classroom environment is closely connected to all the physical, educational, managerial and weather-related issues inside and the adjacent area of the classroom. All these issues might have a great impact on the whole teaching-learning procedure (Kaur, 2017). Along with the sitting furniture, class size, teaching strategy and teaching-learning environment, teachers' attitude and interaction mode with the students are very significant parts of the classroom environment (Jawaid & Aly, 2014). It is important for the teachers and the authorities to organize the whole atmosphere in such a way that the students can feel at ease to take part in each activity and generate something productive (Arshad et al., 2018). To ensure a proper classroom environment, teachers need to work from the planning stage to the implementation stage with high competence, cordiality, loyalty and affection to the students. A precise classroom environment can significantly improve the whole teaching-learning phenomenon through eliminating a number of pedagogical challenges faced by the teachers as well as the learners (Anbalagan, 2017). Ensuring a student-friendly classroom environment is a must in generating better learning of learners at any context and level of education (Malik & Rizvi, 2018). Even a classroom equipped with a proper physical and friendly learning environment can accelerate students' cognitive and productive capacity (Shams et al., 2019). The current study has focused on finding out the pedagogical challenges regarding the classroom environment faced by the HSC-level English teachers in Bangladesh.

Accordingly, the researchers set three objectives for the study: (i) to explore the classroom environment-related challenges that the EFL teachers face while teaching English at the HSC level, (ii) to explore how those phenomena influence English language teaching, and (iii) to recommend probable research-based solutions

Review of Literature

Several researchers investigated the closely related issues to the current study's subject matter. These studies reflect on students' reluctance to interact, large class size, teachers' dominating role, lack of sound relationship between teachers and students, lack of classroom materials and so on as some challenges teachers face while teaching at different levels of education. Another study reveals that language planners, policy makers, linguists and practitioners face challenges of drafting practical language polices and workable implementation plans for language-in-education programmes aiming to promote individuals' social and professional development (Shurovi, 2014). Among the pedagogical challenges, classroom environment-related challenges faced by the teachers have gained much significance in recent studies in the respective arena of research. According to Thomas et al. (2011), the classroom environment is the core issue to reach the real educational achievement, combining all the physical, emotional and other related inside and outside facilities. It basically connects the way of teaching, the behaviour of the teachers, the physical arrangements inside the classroom and the students' attitude as well.

According to Bandello (2015), a positive classroom environment assists both the teachers and the students to play very active and attentive role in the teaching-learning process. The report by OECD (2012) shows that issues included in the classroom environment, like the arrangement of furniture,

students, interactions and relations between the instructors and the students and the overall planning and assistance of the institutional authority, have a great impact on learners' learning. A good classroom environment mainly refers to an inclusive classroom equipped with necessary materials, technological support, manageable class size, an easy atmosphere and other required support from the institution and the instructors (Umar, 2017). Enough arrangement of instructional amenities in the classroom can facilitate students' learning on a great scale. The way and methods of teaching are also very significant parts of the classroom environment (Sulaiman et al., 2011). Necessary resources, including textbooks, technological tools, internet access and the seating furniture, are also very integral parts of the classroom environment to accelerate classroom learning (Qamar et al. 2018).

According to Suleman & Hussain (2014), phenomena like the physical condition of the building, decoration of the room, learning facilities and materials are the major parts of the classroom environment to have a big impact on the teaching and learning issues. College resources, including structural condition, air, water & sanitation facilities, proper supply of electricity and a noise-free environment of the classroom are very key instruments to developing students' learning (Awan, 2018). Olufemii and Olayinka (2017) mentioned that a large class is a major obstacle for teachers to teach the required skills smoothly. Teaching with modern technology in a well-furnished classroom can easily get more concentration of learners at every level of education (Ahmed et al., 2020). Precise utilization of educational ICT tools surely enhances students' classroom learning (Imran et al. 2020). When a classroom is well decorated with colourful teaching materials like attractive tables, grids, maps, walls decorated with educational paintings, a beautiful screen and internet access, students get attracted to stay and learn in the classroom (Fisher, 2008). Pedagogical attainment can be forwarded through well well-environmental classroom setup (Suleman et al., 2014). Studies show that students' achievement is greatly impacted by the environment of their classroom (Akomolafe & Adesua, 2015). According to Manca et al. (2020), students' friendly and well-decorated classroom accelerates learners' learning to a great extent.

Overall, it can be summarized that teaching English at the HSC level is notably influenced by a number of issues and among them teaching-learning environment is a very significant one. The relevance of the current study comes from the gap found in the literature, where most of the studies found are focusing on academic issues related to EFL education in Bangladesh. Current literature demands to see how environmental issues create pedagogical challenges at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

Methodology

The mixed-method approach is deemed an appropriate avenue for the present study. This approach was chosen based on three aspects of the study: the type of problem to be addressed, the goal of the study, and the nature of the data. Ten HSC-level EFL teachers from five institutions in Dhaka, Bangladesh, were selected in a convenience sampling technique for the data collection using two tools: a questionnaire survey and classroom observation. The researchers combined aspects of quantitative and qualitative methods in the stages of data collection and data analysis. Qualitative data collection involved classroom observations. The quantitative data collection was done by a questionnaire survey for the teachers. The researchers also extensively reviewed different journal articles, books and web sources related to the current study's subject matter. The computer program Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS, 26.0) for Windows has been used to analyze quantitative data.

Findings and Discussion

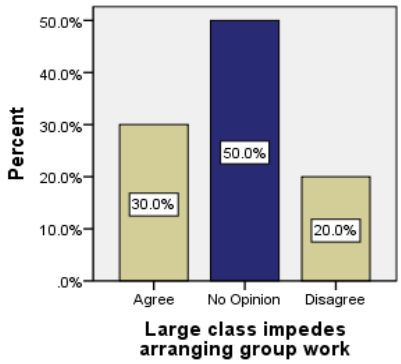
The researchers analyzed the data obtained from the questionnaire survey using the Statistical Computer Software SPSS 26.0. Based on the results of the analysis, the researchers have elaborated findings in the following sections. They have also discussed the findings in detail.

Findings from Questionnaire Survey

Large Class Size Obstructing Classroom Activities

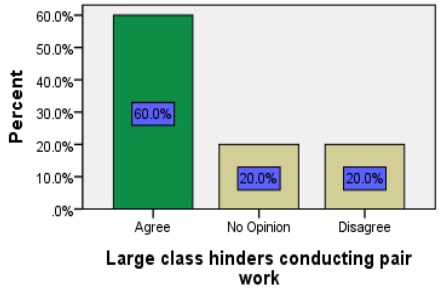
Arranging group work

The first statement of the questionnaire was related to the connection between class size and arranging group work in the classroom. Class size is very significant in teaching and learning because, based on the size of the class, the teacher has to plan teaching and management procedures. When the size of a class is really large, it is tough to reach every single learner, and in the case of English education, it is quite difficult to conduct the classroom activities effectively and to provide sufficient feedback on their delivery. In response to the question regarding the class size and arranging group work, 30% of the participants opined that a large class size impeded arranging group work, though in response to the same issue, only 20% of the student respondents disagreed. It was notable that 50% of the participants had no opinion regarding the statement that indicated maybe they did not usually arrange group work in their classroom, or they did not have proper training and idea about the respective issue.



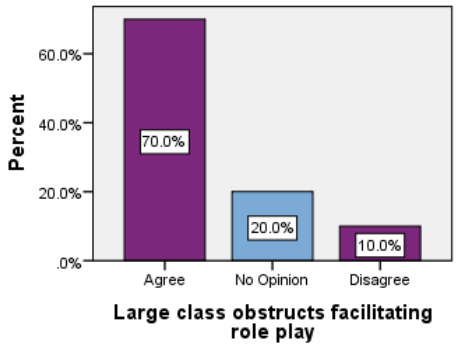
Large class and conducting pair work

The second statement was about whether the large class hindered the teachers from conducting pair work. It is indeed impossible to connect each of the students of a large class for pair work due to time and other related constraints. Regarding the answer to this question, 60% of the teachers agreed that large class size hindered conducting pair work. Only 20% teachers disagreed with the same statement, though the same number of teachers remained neutral. So, it can be said that a good number of teachers did not have a proper idea about arranging pair work in the classroom as well nor did they have much concern about that matter.



Large class and facilitating role play

Statement-3 was initiated to know whether a large class obstructed teachers in facilitating role play. Role play is really a time-consuming activity. So, it's a big challenge for the teacher of a large class to arrange role-play activities in a classroom on a regular basis. While answering the question related to the effect of large class size in facilitating role play, 70% of the participants opined that a large class size obstructed them from facilitating role play in the classroom and in response to the same issue, 20% of the respondents remained neutral. Again, only 10% respondents disagreed regarding this statement.



Classroom Seating Furniture Impeding Classroom Activities

Statements 4, 5 and 6 were about how classroom seating furniture hinders different classroom activities. Table 1 shows the participants' responses to the statements, followed by a descriptive analysis.

Table 1. Classroom seating furniture affecting group work, pair work and role play activities

SL	Statement no.	Activities Impeded	Participants' Response (%)		
			Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
1	4	Group Work	50%	20%	30%
2	5	Pair Work	30%	20%	50%
3	6	Role Play	10%	20%	70%

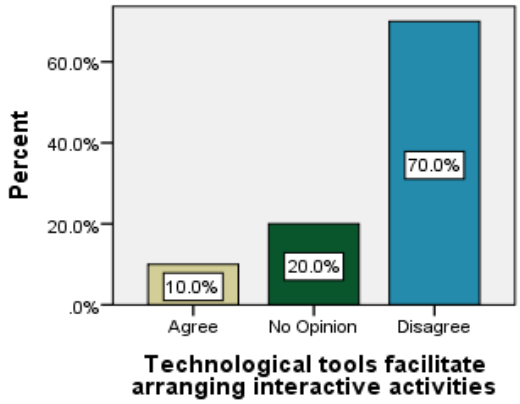
Statement-4 of the questionnaire was about the connection between seating furniture and arranging group work. It is very well known to educators that seating furniture plays a great role in the whole teaching-learning environment of a classroom. Specifically, group work activities need more concentration regarding the seating furniture in a classroom. 50% of the teachers said that the sitting furniture in their classrooms impeded them from arranging group work. In response to the same statement, 30% of the respondents disagreed, and notably, 20% of the respondents remained neutral. Therefore, it can be assumed that without proper arrangement and decoration of seating furniture, it is really challenging for the teachers to arrange group work.

The fifth statement of the questionnaire was about whether the sitting furniture of the classroom impedes the teachers from conducting pair work. As in pair work, the same issue needs a different style of activity, it is really significant to arrange proper seating furniture in the classroom. Only 30% of the teachers opined that the seating furniture of their classrooms hindered them from conducting pair work. It is very significant that in response to the same statement 50% of the respondents disagreed, and notably, 20% of the respondents remained neutral, assuming that a good number of EFL teachers maybe do not have much idea and training on conducting pair work, or they simply ignore this activity in their classroom.

Statement-6 was about the connection between sitting furniture and facilitating role play in the classroom. Facilitating role play needs special attention in the seating furniture. Only 10% of the teachers said that sitting furniture in their classrooms obstructed facilitating role play. Here, it is very significant that in response to the same statement 70% of the respondents disagreed, and notably, 20% of the respondents remained neutral. So, it can be assumed that a good number of EFL teachers do not have much idea and training on facilitating role play in their classroom, or they simply ignore this activity in their classroom.

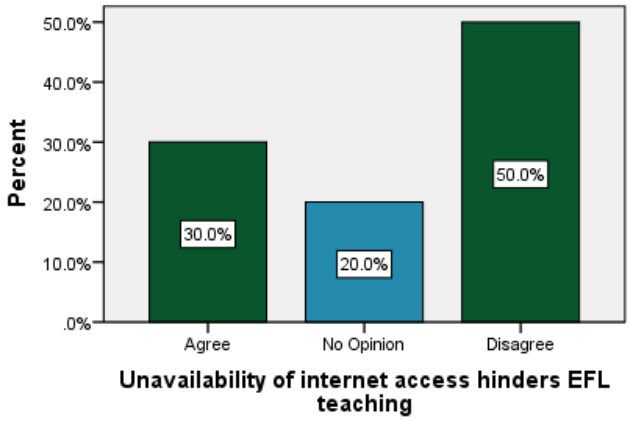
Technological Tools in Arranging Interactive Activities

Statement-7 of the questionnaire was about whether technological tools facilitated arranging interactive activities in the classroom. Technological tools play a significant role in changing the environment of the classroom. 10% of the teachers opined that technological tools facilitated arranging interactive activities in the classroom. However, 70% of the respondents disagreed, and notably, 20% of the respondents remained neutral. It is understandable that most classrooms do not have the necessary technological tools to facilitate interactive activities.



Unavailability of Internet Access

The eighth statement of the questionnaire was about the availability of the internet and whether the unavailability of internet access hindered EFL teaching in the classroom. Without internet access, it's really impossible to think of a smart classroom in this modern era of technological enhancement.

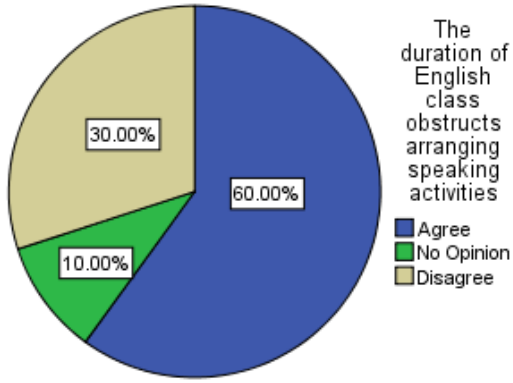


Regarding this statement, only 30% of the teachers opined that the unavailability of internet access hindered EFL teaching in the classroom. Here, it is very significant that in response to the same statement 50% of the respondents disagreed, and notably, 20% of the respondents remained neutral.

The duration of the English class and arranging speaking activities

This statement of the questionnaire was about whether the duration of the English class impacted arranging speaking activities. Speaking activities really need enough time and when the activities are done in a large class size, it's really time consuming.

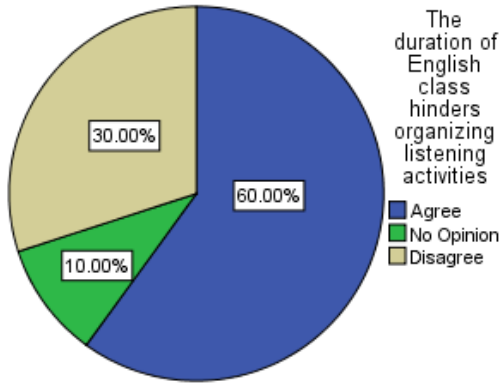
In response to this statement, 60% of the teachers opined that the duration of the English class obstructed arranging speaking activities in their classroom. Regarding the same statement, notably, 30% of the respondents disagreed, and 10% of the respondents remained neutral. So, it can be said that the duration of class time is not enough to arrange effective speaking activities in the classroom.



The duration of the English class and organizing listening activities

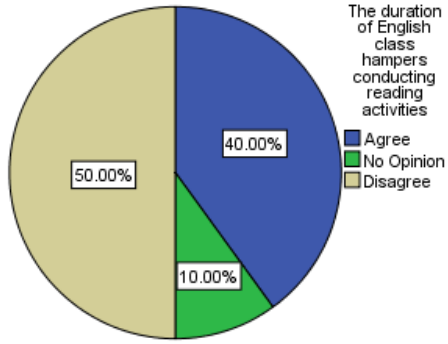
The tenth statement of the questionnaire was about whether the duration of the English class affected organizing listening activities. Listening is also a very time consuming as well as complex issue to deal with the real activities.

Regarding this statement, 60% of the teachers opined that the duration of the English class hindered organizing listening activities in their classroom. Regarding the same statement, notably, 30% of the respondents disagreed, and 10% of the respondents remained neutral. So, it can be summarized that the duration of class is quite insufficient for the teachers to organize listening activities in the EFL classroom.



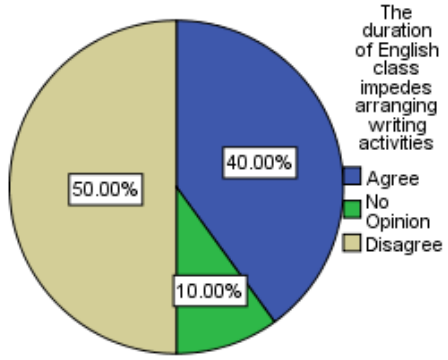
The duration of English class and conducting reading activities

This statement of the questionnaire was about whether the duration of the English class hampered conducting English reading activities. Reading is a must in an EFL class, though the activities related to reading need a longer duration. In response to this statement, 40% of the teachers said that the duration of the English class hampered conducting reading activities in their classroom. Regarding the same statement, very significantly, 50% of the respondents disagreed, and 10% of the respondents remained neutral. From the data, it can be said that proper reading activities cannot be practiced in the classroom due to time constraints as well as maybe a number of teachers do not have much idea and training on arranging those activities.



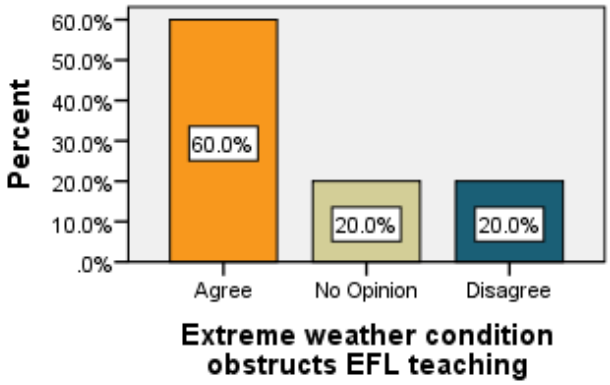
The duration of the English class and arranging writing activities

The twelfth statement of the questionnaire was about whether the duration of the English class impeded arranging English writing activities. Writing is such a skill that needs more time to arrange the related activities in the classroom. Regarding this statement, 40% of the teachers opined that the duration of the English class impeded arranging writing activities in their classroom. Regarding the same statement, 50% of the respondents disagreed, and 10% of the respondents remained neutral.



Extreme weather condition and EFL teaching

Weather condition is a very impactful phenomenon for the teaching and learning environment. Participants' responses to statetment-13 revealed that the extreme weather condition also obstructed EFL teaching.

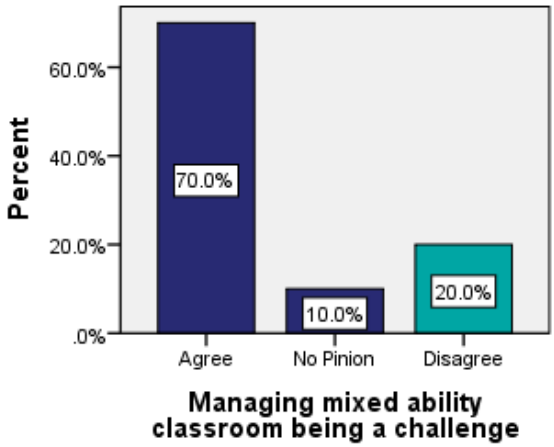


In response to this statement, very notably, 60% of the teachers opined that extreme weather conditions obstructed EFL teaching in their classroom. Regarding the same statement, 20% of the respondents disagreed, and notably, 20% of the respondents remained neutral.

Managing Mixed Ability Classroom

Statement-14 was about challenge of managing mixed ability classroom. It is absolutely tough for the teachers to teach EFL skills effectively in a mixed-ability class because of the big difference in background knowledge and other related issues among the students.

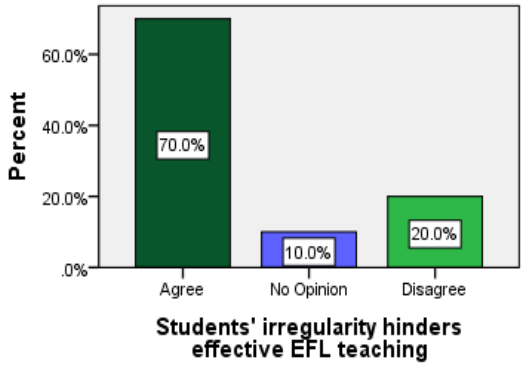
Regarding this statement, 70% of the teachers opined that it was a big challenge for them to manage mixed-ability students in their classroom. Regarding the same statement, 20% of the respondents disagreed, and 10% of the respondents remained neutral. So, it can be said that every classroom is full of mixed-ability students having big differences among the learners in relation to knowledge and attitude.



Students' Irregularity and EFL Teaching

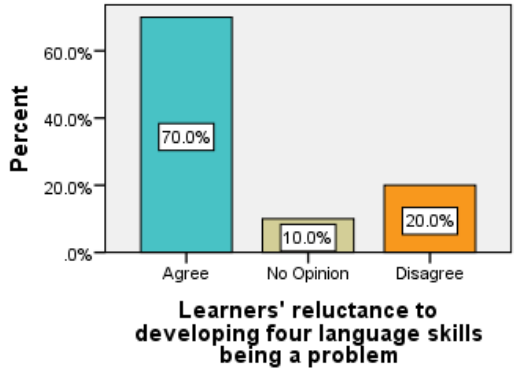
Statement-15 of the questionnaire was about whether students' irregularity in the classroom hindered effective EFL teaching. Students' regularity in the classroom is a must for ensuring effective teaching in the classroom.

In response to this statement, very notably, 70% of the teachers said that students' irregularity in the classroom hindered effective EFL teaching. Regarding the same statement, 20% of the respondents disagreed and 10% of the respondents had no opinion.



Learners' Reluctance to Develop Four Language Skills

The final statement of the questionnaire was about whether learners' reluctance to develop four language skills was a problem. Students' willingness is the key factor in learning four EFL skills in the classroom. Significantly, 70% of the teachers opined that learners' reluctance to develop four language skills was a big problem for them to teach them effectively. However, 20% of the respondents disagreed and 10% of the respondents had no opinion.



Classroom Observation Report

From the classroom observation, it has been explored that though role plays, simulation, picture description activities, story reading activities, information gap activities, jigsaw activity etc. are very important part of teaching EFL skills, for the large size of the class and short duration of timing, most

of the teachers could not arrange the necessary activities for developing students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Again, while observing the classroom, it has been observed that the class size varied from 25 students to 60 students, which is a great problem for the English language teachers to connect with each of the students in different activities. Though sometimes they have tried to involve the students in several activities, the large class size has caused problems in arranging any fruitful activity. In case of the arrangement of necessary technological tools, it has been noticed that a number of classrooms do not have the minimum standard setup of necessary ICT tools, and where there is a good setup, for the short duration of class time students rarely get the opportunity to deal with that modern technology. Besides, a number of teachers seem incompetent to handle those tools because of the lack of teacher training. It has also been observed that the sitting furniture in the classroom seems inappropriate for conducting communicative activities to the researchers. Most of the classrooms are decorated with traditional seating arrangements, including long wooden benches. Students do not have any opportunity to talk to others face-to-face. The empty space in front of the front benches is narrow and inadequate for conducting simulations and role plays; that empty space is not suitable. Finally, the researchers found that most of the classrooms are not well decorated and air-conditioned. The irritating sound from outside the classrooms has also caused problems for teaching EFL skills.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The way in which English is being taught at different educational levels in Bangladesh remains dissatisfactory to all. The low standard of English in the country has always been a matter of concern to all language learners and teachers. In recent years, after the emergence of ELT as an academic field, progress has been remarkable. Though English is taught as a mandatory subject at almost all levels of education in Bangladesh but the outcome is not up to the mark yet. The study is potentially significant in that it will offer educators and policymakers insights into English language teaching and learning at the HSC level in Bangladesh. Most importantly, it highlights the voices of teachers, the very important people at the center of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it can be concluded that, classroom environment has a great impact on English education at every level of study, especially at the HSC level of education, as the learners are on the way to entering university education.

The researchers also made some recommendations considering the findings of the study. Authorities for HSC education should ensure a healthy, modern, safe and joyful classroom environment providing the amenities of proper ventilation, temperature, lighting, suitable furniture and teaching-learning materials for smooth learning and teaching. The college committee should continuously monitor the classroom environment and take proper initiative to improve the environment. Teachers should observe the classroom environment regularly and reverse different phenomena according to the learners' needs. Teachers should create more sections to divide large class sizes. Finally, students should be made aware of keeping their classroom cleaner and healthier.

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