

**Impact of Classroom Environment on English Education:
A Study at the Primary Level in Bangladesh**

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Abstract: *Classroom environment is one of the most impactful issue in the education system of every level, especially for English education at the primary level in Bangladesh as English being a foreign language needs more attention in the field of teaching and learning. The aim of the present study was to explore the impact of classroom environment on English education at the primary level in Bangladesh. The study was qualitative in nature. It was consisted of review of extensive literature in the respective field, interviews with six primary English teachers from six schools and the observation of six classroom from those schools. It was found from the cross-checking of teachers' interview and classroom observation that most of the schools did not have suitable classroom environment that negatively impacted English education. In most of the cases, class size was large that created noise and broke the learners' concentration often. Again, poor lighting facilities, improper ventilation system and hot temperature were very common scenario in most of the schools. Most importantly, seating furniture were uncomfortable to the learners and the teaching materials were very traditional as well. Some positive scenario were also found in only two schools that classrooms were decorated with comfortable furniture, enough lighting, fan and some modern teaching materials but there were noise as well because of the adjacent crowded area as those schools were located in urban area. It was highly recommended that government authorities for primary education, school committee and the teachers should be more cordial to ensure a healthy, safe and learner friendly classroom environment with all kind of modern facilities.*

Keywords: *Classroom Environment, English Education, Primary, Impact*

1. Introduction

Education system of Bangladesh is consisted of primary, secondary, higher secondary and tertiary levels where primary level is the biggest and foremost level of education dealing with building the real foundation of teaching-learning phenomenon. This level of education is mainly provided by the government primary schools all over the country but there are many non-government primary schools led by different enterprises and NGOs as well. English is a

mandatory subject at every level of education in Bangladesh as at the primary level. It is really very difficult to provide quality English education to such a large number of learners at the primary stage in Bangladesh because many issues like standard curriculum and syllabus, trained teachers, relevant materials and the perfect classroom environment are prerequisites to ensure the quality education. In Bangladesh, the reality of the classroom has certainly been ignored. Although English has been taught compulsorily in schools from primary to secondary level, students' performance in English is generally still found to be very poor. National Education Commission put importance on English education from the primary level. The purpose of the recommendations of this commission was to make the primary school students primarily skilled to use four language skills at a minimum level. Though the government has already taken different initiative to improve the primary education including recruitment of quality teachers, moderating curriculum, providing updated materials, the classroom environment still is still overlooked, especially in the rural area of the country. As a result, a large number of students cannot cope with the whole system of English education at this level and very simply they fail to learn English expectedly.

“Classroom environment” is explained by several educationists. Fraser (1986) viewed it shared perception of the students and sometimes of the teachers in that environment. Walberg (1974) said that the classroom psychological or social environment refers to the climate or atmosphere of a class as a social group that potentially influences what students learn. Moss and Trickit (1974) mentioned that the classroom learning environment is a dynamical social system which includes not only teachers' behavior and teacher - student interaction but student - student as well". Fraser (1991) opined the concept of classroom environment as: “Classroom learning environment carries a variety of meanings; it generally refers to the total climate, structures, processes, ethos within class- rooms which are integral elements affecting student's learning" (P231). Precise classroom environment plays a vital role in creating an interesting environment for the whole teaching-learning process. Though the government has already taken different initiative to improve the primary education including recruitment of quality teachers, moderating curriculum, providing updated materials, the classroom environment still is still overlooked, especially in the rural area of the country. As a result, a large number of students cannot cope with the whole system of English education at this level and very simply they fail to learn English expectedly.

2. Literature Review

The aim of the present study was to examine the impact of classroom environment on English teaching-learning process at the primary level in Bangladesh. So, this part of the study aims at making connection with the other studies in the respective arena. Oni (1992) mentioned that physical facilities comprise a key variable in working of an association as they decide the incredible execution of any social association or system including education. Physical facilities are considered empowering elements that assume a key part in enhancing scholastic

accomplishment in the educational system i.e., classrooms, school infrastructure, furniture, housing, libraries, research centers, entertaining types of tools, apparatuses etc.

English has been being taught mandatory from primary to tertiary level, but the performance is still below the standard. Jones & Jones (1995) opined that the learning environment is a critical determinant of whether learning can happen in any classroom. Successful interpersonal abilities are the establishment for good classroom administration. Minding interpersonal collaborations are basic in meeting such critical individual needs as wellbeing and security, belongingness, and self-regard. Smith (2003) explains that positive classroom learning situations are ones that boost learning for all learning and cultivate their improvement as all-encompassing creatures by considering scholarly, enthusiastic, social and physical development. A positive learning environment is thoughtful and responsive. It is created and balanced after some time with reason, with concentrate on the wanted result of guaranteeing that all learners have entry to world-class instruction. It is a place in which we comprehend and execute educational modules utilizing instructional procedures that address the issues of our learners and reflection on results illuminate future practices. This environment is reflected in well-managed classroom and it is expected to comprehend the classroom administration.

Studies made on the classroom environment have explored that physical classroom arrangement plays an important role in teaching-learning process affecting the performance of both teachers and students. According to (Lippman, 2010), the learning setting is comprised of different things i.e., learners, teachers and the physical environment Physical environment is simply defined as the physical characteristics of the room. It refers to the different things i.e., size of the room, lighting, degree of temperature, condition of classroom floor whether it is carpeted or just concrete etc (www.enotes.com). (Fisher, 2008) mentioned that physical classroom environment refers to the physical room in which teacher and learners are the main element including its spatial elements i.e., floor, windows, walls as well as other classroom equipment i.e., desks, chairs, rugs, chalkboards, tack boards, easels, counters and computer equipment but not limited to these things. Taylor and Vlastos (2009) examined the relationship between environment and design within the classroom from a theoretical perspective. They found that physical environment of the classroom acts as “Silent curriculum”. It means that classroom environmental design can facilitate and improve the learning process like the overt curriculum. MacAulay (1990) and Walker et al (1995) explored that a well-structured classroom can enhance students’ academic and behavioral outcomes. Haertel, et al (1981) believed that students’ perceptions of classroom environment as an important factor that show some aspects of students’ outcomes i.e., achievement, motivation and satisfaction. They further concluded that achievement in cognitive and affective learning outcomes were repeatedly associated with classrooms environment, which were perceived as having greater cohesiveness, satisfaction, goal direction, organization and less friction.

3. Objective of the Study

The general objective of the present study is to examine the impact of classroom environment on English education at the primary level in Bangladesh. Specific objectives cover:

- i. To identify the affective environmental issues related to the language learning and teaching
- ii. To explore how those phenomena influence language learning and teaching
- iii. To provide probable research based solutions.

4. Methodology

The present study has been undertaken based on qualitative method including extensive review of literature in the respective arena, in-depth interview and classroom observation. The researcher has chosen six primary schools, three from urban area and other three from rural area to conduct the study. Total six primary school teachers teaching English were interviewed to have their opinion regarding the impact of classroom environment on English education of their learners. Teachers' Interviews were recorded with audio recorder and noted on paper as well. The researcher has also observed six classroom from those six primary schools and cross checked the data obtained from teachers' interviews and classroom observation as well. Recommendations have been made through connecting teachers' opinion, classroom observation report and the researcher's personal experience as a teacher.

5. Findings and Discussion

This section of the study is consisted of findings and discussion based on extensive review of literature on classroom environment, teacher interview and classroom observation.

5.1 Findings from Extensive Review of related Studies on Classroom Environment

Classroom environment is one of the essential prerequisite for smooth education in every level. It is basically a combination of lighting, temperature, ventilation system, size of the room, floor, walls, desks, chairs, rugs, whiteboards, computers etc. Good physical environment has a significant positive effect on the achievement of objectives of an educational institution. Review of Literature on the classroom environment have revealed that physical arrangement plays a vital role in teaching learning process. It can affect the performance of both teachers and students (Savage, 1999; Stewart and Evans, 1997).

According to Halstead (1974), classroom environment is designed in such a way that obstructs the learning process although researches have established a close correlation between the amount of work individual do and its physical environment. It stands to reason that a student sitting in an insufferably hot, airless room listening to a lecture on cryogenics would not learn as much as he would in a cool, comfortable space. Akande (1995) explored that learning can occur

through one's interaction with one's environment. Environment here refers to facilities that are available to facilitate students learning outcome. It includes books, audio-visual, software and hardware of educational technology; so also, size of classroom, sitting position and arrangement, availability of tables, chairs, chalkboards, shelves on which instruments for practical are arranged. According to Steve and Richard (2013), when a student first steps into a room they will make a judgment about the type of class they are going to be taking. They will look to see how desks are arranged. They will notice what is hanging on the walls. The way in which a teacher sets up their class allows them to communicate with their students nonverbally. Fraser (1986) classified the classroom learning environment into four major components which includes: physical things, the social interaction among its members, the characteristics of its members and systems, values, cognitive structures etc., so, a classroom learning environment can be explained with reference to either physical or social aspects. This study considers only the social aspects of the classroom learning environment which includes teacher's behavior and students' behavior (both verbal and non-verbal communications), teaching and learning methodologies, teachers' classroom management practices, teaching and learning styles, attitudes, personality traits, beliefs, group dynamics, socio-economic status of the students, cultural diversity of the classroom called its social component of the classroom environment. Freiberg, Driscoll and Knights (1999) examined that some of the notable factors that may influence students' academic achievement in schools are; school climate, instructional materials, discipline, physical facilities, teacher quality, type of location of school and class size. This is because, schools with a good and conducive environment that has the best type of teachers, instructional materials and physical facilities will produce better school leavers with high achievement. Most at times parents of students are not satisfied with the facilities provided in their school. Also, the extent at which some teachers, exhibit high level of indiscipline does not seem to portray them as role models. They rather encourage indiscipline among students by their attitudes. This may have negative influence of students' academic achievement.

Lyons (2001) opined that poor school facilities adversely impact teachers' effectiveness and also their performance. Consequently it negatively affects student achievement. MacAulay (1990) and Walker et al (1995) found that a well-structured classroom can enhance students' academic and behavioral outcomes. Haertel, et al (1981) explored that students' perceptions of classroom environment as an important factor that show some aspects of students' outcomes i.e., achievement, motivation and satisfaction. They further concluded that achievement in cognitive and affective learning outcomes were repeatedly associated with classrooms environment, which were perceived as having greater cohesiveness, satisfaction, goal direction, organization and less friction. Halstead (1974) unfolded that it is generally accepted that high temperature and humidity creates physiological and psychological problems which expedite fatigue, causes people to work more slowly, apply much efforts and causes to make more mistakes and errors. The classroom climate should be cautiously managed not only to provide physical comfort but also to serve as a positive factor in the learning process by stimulating attentiveness and

concentration. To maintain such a climate, the atmosphere must be treated to simultaneously controlled temperature, humidity, cleanliness and circulation. Earthman (2004) established that temperature, heating and air quality are the fundamental elements for the educational attainment of students. Phillips (1992) noted that lighting is one of the most important physical characteristics of classroom. He further stated that visual environment can affect the capability of students to perceive visual stimuli and also affect their mental attitude.

5.2 Findings from Teacher Interview

While taking the interview, regarding the issue of class size, most of the teachers mentioned that they had to deal with large class of 50-60 students where every student could not be involved in EFL speaking and listening practice, and no fruitful interaction took place. Only teacher spoke and students were passive listeners. Every student could not be involved in all the activities. On the other hand, only two teachers mentioned that their class size are small with 20-30 students. Answer to the question related to the seating furniture, most of the teachers said that benches were placed like a lecture theatre and that's why students sitting in back rows were not attentive. On the contrary, only one teacher said that his school had desk for every student in round sitting that helped for group work and eye contact with the students. It was opined by most of the teachers that they used books published by NCTB, chalk, duster and board as the teaching materials. Only three teachers added that in some cases they used audiovisual materials and PowerPoint slides.

Regarding the question of teachers' step when the student attend classes in extreme hot/cold weather, all of them opined that they tried to do some funny activities to make the students happy but that also was difficult to make them attentive. Even, sometimes they needed to stop teaching in such cases. Interestingly, they mentioned that extreme me hot was the main challenge rather the cold weather. Answer to the question of dealing with noise, three of the teachers believed that they did not face any extreme external noise as their schools were located in rural area. They claimed some internal noise for large class size but they could manage those strictly. On the other hand, two of them mentioned that in some situation they had to experience serious external noise for the school being beside busy roads. And one teacher claimed that for the school being located in a crowded building are they had to experience some external noise.

5.3 Findings from Classroom Observation

It was explored from the classroom observation that in most of the cases, the class size being big the teachers could not teach the students well and the students also could not learn well, especially when they did EFL listening and speaking practices. Even, in case of writing, it was quite impossible for the teacher to check all the scripts. Seating furniture were not suitable for pair and group works as in most of the schools, there were long and high benches.

They used chalk, duster, textbook, board and in few cases they used projector. The projector sometimes made disturbance. To deal with hot weather they had electric fan in their class room but those were not sufficient and it was also seen that some of them were not working well. In cold weather they had no ability to provide the students to lessen their coldness. It was observed that lighting facilities were not up to the mark in most of the cases and in time of load-shedding they did not have any backup like generator or IPS.

It was a common seen in the large classes that the teachers tried to stop the internal noise starting an interesting story related to their text and motivate them. Sometimes the teachers tried to involve the students with learning to stop noise but those techniques were not fruitful all the moments. On the contrary, it was also seen that external noise was sometimes beyond their control while teaching English. Because the noise was almost far from them.

5.4 Summary of the Findings

To sum up the findings of the study, it can easily be said that the findings from teachers' interview and classroom observation are almost same. Most of the cases, it has been explored that the present classroom environment in every primary school has negative impact on English education except some of the positive issues in some schools. Though this core phenomenon has been overlooked for a long period of time, it is time to pay much attention to improve the classroom environment for true English education of our children.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the review of Extensive literature in the respective area, teachers' interview, classroom observation and the researchers experience some recommendations are:

- i. Authorities for primary 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.
- ii. Every classrooms should be decorated with colorful maps, charts, posters and other attractive materials to make the learners feel ease and enchanted in the classroom.
- iii. It is recommended that blackboards should be replaced with whiteboards to draw clear attention of the learners.
- iv. As load-shedding is very common in rural area so, additional power supply should be ensured in the schools.
- v. School committee should continuously monitor the classroom environment and take proper initiative to improve the environment.
- vi. Teachers should observe the classroom environment regularly and reverse different phenomena according to the learners needs.
- vii. Teachers should create more sections dividing large class size.

- viii. Finally, students should be made aware of keeping their classroom more clean and healthy.

So, based on the findings and recommendations, it can be summed up that, classroom environment has a great impact on English education in every level of study, especially at the primary level of education as the learners are in the first stage of learning with very little age. Proper consideration of the findings of the study and the implantation of the recommendations will surely contribute to the development of the whole system and encourage more researches in the respective field.

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