

TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Since the education system in Bangladesh is in the process of change over the last few years, we see the reflection of this change in primary education also. Government, ministry of education and concerned authorities are trying to bring changes in curriculum, materials, activities, techniques of teaching, quality of teachers etc. This change is essential in English language teaching since it is taught as a second language in Bangladesh. Therefore, in this research paper, the researcher focused on English language teaching of young learners in primary schools of rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. This study addresses two central research objectives: examining the condition of English language teaching in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh, and noticing factors which are creating gap between rural and urban young learners of Bangladesh. The researcher uses questionnaire and informal interview for data collection. Data has been analyzed through qualitative and quantitative research studies. The respondents from both rural and urban areas expressed dissatisfaction over shortage of teachers and work load. It was found that young learners like English as a subject and that government and different stake holders have already taken some initiatives to minimize the gap in English language teaching.

Key words: Young learners, primary education, rural and urban areas

Introduction

Learning a foreign language (English) is really a serious challenge, and in Bangladesh it is much more difficult as we do not have a suitable foreign (English) language learning atmosphere. In Bangladesh English is

considered as a foreign language and it is taught as a compulsory subject from class one in Bangla medium government schools. However, the facilities that urban school children have, rural school children do not have. As a result, the gap between rural and urban children is increasing day by day. Since a proper learning atmosphere has not been ensured in children's classes according to children's interest and psychological characteristics, little benefit has yet to come from the compulsory English education at the primary level. So, by ensuring suitable teaching environment at the primary level, many problems regarding English education can be solved (Ara, 2009). All the factors concerning English education in Bangladesh have to be involved in a unified effort to ensure a stress-free environment for primary level English learners. Therefore, the researcher looked at the opinion of government primary school teachers from rural and urban areas of Bangladesh to understand the actual condition of English language teaching of young learners in Bangladesh.

Young Learners in Bangladesh

The age of what is termed 'Young Learners' varies from country to country and in Bangladesh it varies depending on age, social and financial conditions of children's family (Blanchet, 2001). In Bangladesh young learners are called "shishu" (Child). But the word "shishu" (Child) does not refer only to the age or physical development of child; it refers to a child's life circumstances. Generally in a poor country like Bangladesh, the eldest of a family is likely to take on responsibilities for younger siblings and be required sooner to act in a grown up manner. This is said to shorten the "shishukal" (young age). Similarly, a child who is forced to work at a young age is not considered to be "shishu" (Child) anymore. On the other hand, a child well provided and cared for, a child kept away from responsibilities may remain a "shishu" (Child) up to the age 12 (Blanchet, 2001). According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2000), the compulsory education range is 6 to 10 years and this is the age of young learners in Bangladesh. Education Watch 2008 also mentions that 6-10 is the age of primary education of children in Bangladesh.

Historical Overview of Primary Education

Primary education in Bangladesh was developed following the British model until 1973 (Quddus, 2007). The Bengal Primary Education Act of 1930, and rules and regulations framed under it were the guiding principles.

Under this Act, primary education was free and regulated through District Primary Education Boards financially and operationally. He also says that primary schools were established by local communities on their own initiative and usually managed by managing committees made up of guardians and other interested members of the local elites. The appointment and payment of teachers were the responsibility of the School Management Committees (Husain,1978). Until the nationalization of primary schools in 1974, there were four types of primary school in Bangladesh: government funded, municipality-funded, partially government supported (now called “Registered”) and unaided and unrecognized (now called “Unregistered”) (Quddus, 2007).

A far-reaching change in the primary education sub-system was introduced in February 1974 when the government passed the “The Primary School Takeover Ordinance” which came into effect in October 1973 (Quddus, 2007). Under this Act all “recognized” primary schools became government institutions, free from community involvement and supervision; their assets – including lands, buildings, and funds – were also assigned as government property; and most importantly, primary teachers became government employees i.e. part of the national civil-service system under central bureaucratic control (Quddus, 2007).

Later, in 1992, Bangladesh prepared an EFA: National Plan of Action (NPA I), 1992-2000, as a follow-up of WCEFA (World Conference on Education for All) and expression of its firm determination to improve the situation of basic education (NPA I) (Quddus, 2007). NPA I covered few basic education program areas like: i) Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), ii) Universalization of Formal Primary Education (UPE). The intention was to keep the children occupied and initiate them to primary education, without a formal structure.

Later the first Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-I) was implemented in the mid 1990s through several projects (Quddus, 2007). As a result, 1, 79, 53, 300 children were enrolled 82,868 primary schools in the country and are taught by more than 3,52,935 teachers. Then the government took PEDP-2 program. The Second Primary Education Development Program 2007 (PEDP-II) is the largest education program of the government catering to primary education for all children and implemented by Directorate of Primary Education under supervision of MOPME (Quddus, 2007).

In terms of the management and supervision of primary schools we can say that the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and its subordinate offices in the district and upazila are solely responsible for management and supervision of primary education (Sedere, 2000). Their responsibilities include recruitment, posting, and transfer of teachers and other staff; arranging in-service training of teachers; distribution of free textbooks; and supervision of schools (Quddus, 2007).

Profile of Primary School Teachers

The teachers may be the most important factor in child's early education (Feeny, Christenser & Moravcik, 2001) and in 1973, teachers became government servants in Bangladesh (Dove, 1984). Later under the "Primary School Teachers' Recruitment Rules, 1991", an assistant teacher who wanted to be a head teacher needed the following qualifications (Quddus, 2007):

- HSC and Certificate-in-Education (C-in-Ed) with at least seven years of active teaching experience; or
- SSC and Higher-C-in-Ed (HC-in-Ed) with at least 7 years of teaching experience; or
- A Bachelor degree from a recognized university with at least 3 years teaching experience in either primary or secondary school; or
- A Masters degree from a recognized university without any teaching experience or training related to primary education (for example, C-in-Ed).

On the other hand, assistant head teacher needs four years of teaching experience as assistant teacher (Quddus, 2007).

An assistant teacher needs H.S.C. or equivalent degree and Certificate in Education training from any government recognized teacher's training institute (Government Primary School Teachers' Recruitment Rules, 1991).

Primary School Teachers' Training

There are 54 Primary Training Institutes (PTIs), including a private one in Bangladesh (Quddus, 2007). One-year Certificate in Education (C-

in-Ed) course has been offered in the PTIs since 1952. The C-in-Ed is pre-service training but operationally it is in-service in nature (Quddus, 2007). Since 1988, only untrained primary teachers have been admitted to the C-in-Ed course in the PTIs (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993:5). In addition to the C-in-Ed training, a one-year Higher Certificate in Education (HC-in-Ed) course has been offered to would-be head teachers of government primary schools; this was first introduced in the 1988-89 session at the NAPE (National Academy for Primary Education) (FREPD, 1995:141). Some GPS (Government Primary School) teachers, particularly those who want to be an UEO (Upazilla Education Officer) or AUEO (Additional Upazilla Education Officer), take the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) course offered in the Teacher Training Colleges 140 (TTCs) or Universities. In addition to the B. Ed course, the Diploma in Education (Dip-in-Ed) is also offered by the Institute of Education and Research (IER) at the University of Dhaka and School of Education at the Open University; this is mainly intended for graduate primary teachers. It is interesting to note that the B.Ed course offered by the TTCs is basically designed for secondary school teachers and not suitable for primary teachers (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993:8).

Academic atmosphere in Both Areas

So far in the context is Bangladesh, poverty is the main reason of dropping from school (*The Financial Express*, April 3, 2011). It is a very familiar picture in rural areas of Bangladesh. In the urban areas poverty shows another picture, now-a-days school means something expensive. In urban areas, school + coaching + private tuition + self reading = too expensive to continue or to cope with the educational structure. Regarding this, Bijoy Lal Basu (*The Financial Express*, April 3, 2011) says that the main factors behind the poor performance of the rural children- mainly at the primary level is that they get low encouragement from their parents, low motivation from both parents and school teachers. Dove (1984) also says village children have very little motivation to go to school. The school may be a long walk away across fields and streams, dusty in winter and flooded in summer. Arriving tired and hungry, the children enter an unkempt school compound where the cows and goats roam. Schools are inadequately maintained, cold in winter and stiflingly hot in summer. Dove also says the lucky children may find benches to sit on, the rest sit on the floor. One or two lucky children may have textbooks, but the majority has none. Most village children drop out long before class 5 for they find school an

uncomfortable and irrelevant place to be.

Statistics taken from urban centers reveal that parents are spending too much on improving their offspring's prospects (Khan, 2005). A household in urban areas spends at least half of their income on private teachers at the primary and secondary level and take out a miserable living either by taking loan or adjusting the shortfall through some other means. The coaching centers are doing lucrative business in urban areas

Research Procedure

Research Design

The nature of the study is descriptive, experimental and analytical that tries to present the condition of young learners' (govt. primary school) teaching in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. So, the researcher has used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. There are two steps for collecting data- distributing questionnaire to thirty govt. primary school teachers (Urban+ Rural areas) from seven schools of Dhaka and Manikgonj districts, and conversing with those teachers. The data has been analyzed from Vygotsky and Piaget's theories point of view.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher adopts Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory for this research work. According to this theory, community plays a major role in learning a language. Vygotsky gives more emphasis on culture, social factors and the role of language in cognitive development. In case of cognitive development, he talks about two principles:

- More knowledgeable Others (MKO)
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

This theory helped the researcher because in terms of selecting appropriate materials, activities, and techniques for young learners, it is better to know their social background, culture, their likings and dislikes.

At the same time, the researcher followed Piaget's theory on the child. Piaget says children's development must necessarily proceed through their learning. He says learner's cognitive structure develops through age. This theory also assists the researcher selecting materials, activities for young

learners depending on their age.

Sampling

At first, the researcher selects three schools of Singair thana under Manikgonj district and four schools from Dhaka city. Among ten government primary schools; five are from urban and five are from rural areas of that thana. On the other hand, in case of the questionnaire, the researcher gave both open and close ended questions. He also gave Bangla translation of all questions since the respondents are primary level teachers and they are not proficient in English.

Study place

The study was conducted among three school (such as, Naddah Rajnaga Govt. Primary School, Char Madavpur Govt. Primary School and Raydakkin Govt. Primary School) from Singair thana of Manikgonj district, and four schools (such as, Khilkhet Kawler Govt. Primary School, Kurmitola Govt. Primary School, Hussain Mohammed Ershad Govt. Primary school and Kuril Govt. Primary school) from Dhaka city.

Study period

The study was conducted from May 2012 to July 2013.

Research instruments

The instruments of the research are questionnaire for survey, sometimes informal conversation with teachers, using a likert scale.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of collected data

In the questionnaire there are five close-ended questions which the researcher use for quantitative research study and other five questions (open-ended) are used for qualitative research study. In this study 30 respondents' data have been collected, where most of the respondents replied in English. In the questionnaire, question no 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 are used for quantitative study.

Regarding question I, five (33%) teachers from urban areas and four (26%) teachers from rural areas believe that young learners get interest to learn English in young age.

Q 0I: Do you think students get any interest to learn English in their young age?

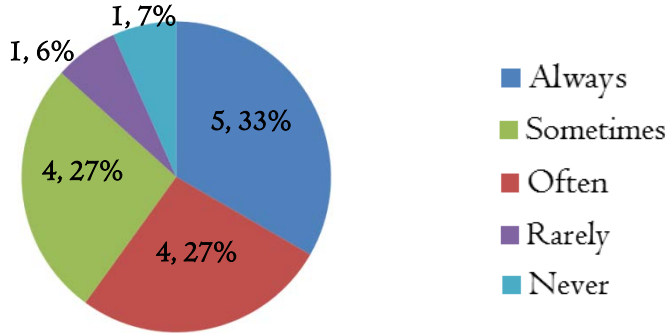


Table: I urban teachers' opinion

Q 0I: Do you think students get any interest to learn English in their young age?

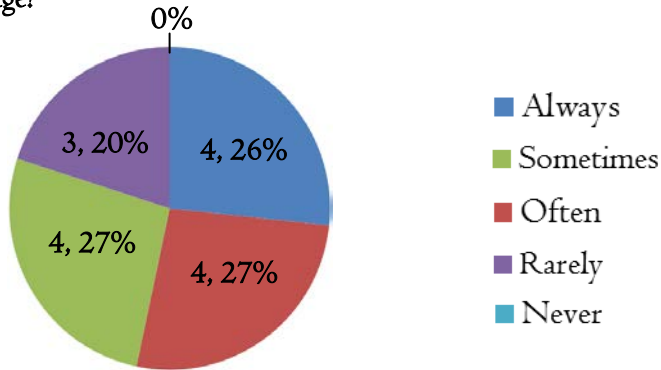


Table: I rural teachers' opinion

Four teachers (27%) from both urban and rural areas believe that sometimes young learners are interested in learning English. 6% teachers from urban areas believe that young learners are somewhat interested in learning English; but in rural areas, this percentage is much higher, three (20%) teachers consider that young learners get little interest in learning English.

Regarding question 2, five (33%) teachers from urban areas think that students do not have adequate facilities in learning English but interestingly only one (7%) teacher believe that they have less facilities in teaching English.

Q 02: Do you think students in your school get adequate facilities to learn English language?

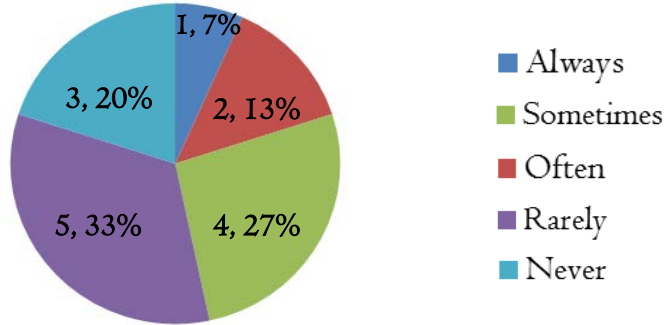


Table: I urban teachers’ opinion

On the other hand, one (7%) teachers from urban areas believe that students have adequate facilities to learn English, but in rural areas three (20%) teachers judge that they get adequate facilities in learning English. Only two (13%) teachers from rural areas think that they do not get any facilities in teaching English.

Q 02: Do you think students in your school get adequate facilities to learn English language?

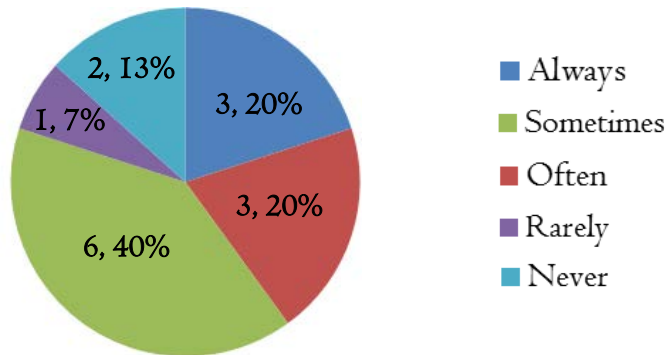


Table: 2 rural teachers' opinion

In reply to question 3, six (40%) teachers from urban areas and eight (53%) teachers from rural areas think that they sometimes use special techniques to teach young learners in the class room.

Q 03: Do you follow any special technique to teach English to children in the classroom

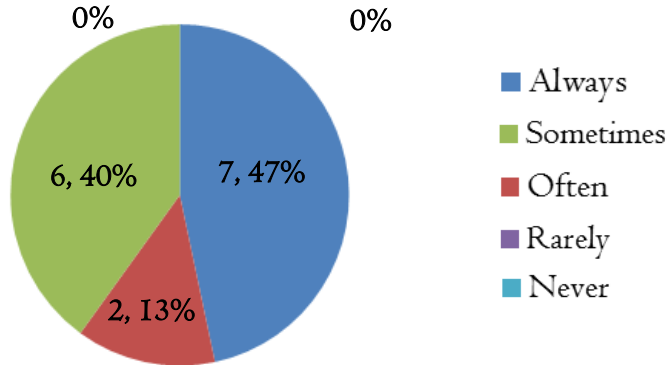


Table: I urban teacher's opinion

Q 03: Do you follow any special technique to teach English to children in the classroom?

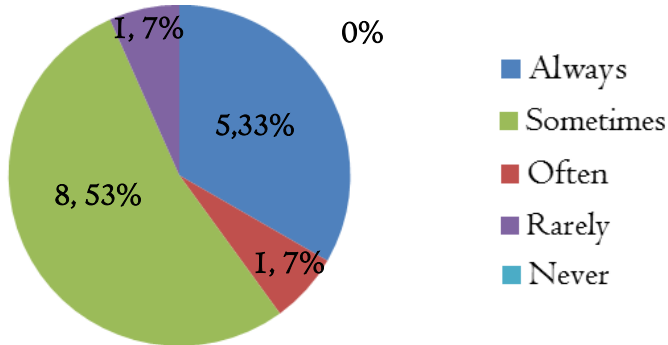


Table: 2 rural teachers' opinion

Seven teachers (47%) from urban areas and five (33%) teachers from rural areas consider that they always use special techniques in teaching young learners. Interestingly, there is no teacher from both urban and rural areas who never use special techniques in teaching English.

In response to question five, it is found that ten (67%) teachers from urban areas and eight (54%) teachers from rural areas sometimes use other supplementary/ additional books

Q 05: Do you follow other supplementary/additional books to teach English to young students?

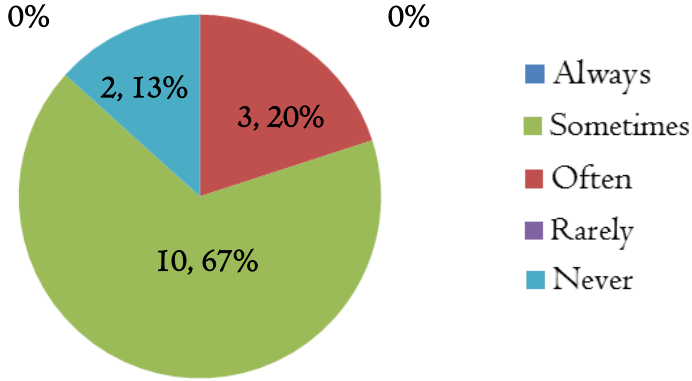


Table: I urban teachers’ opinion

Q 05: Do you follow other supplementary/additional books to teach English to young students?

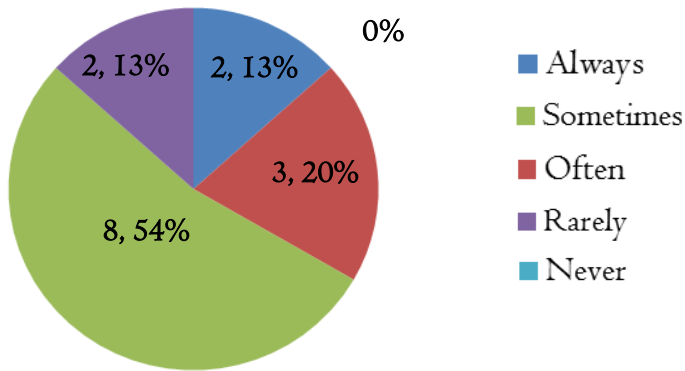


Table 2: rural teachers’ opinion

To teach English to young learners, three (20%) teachers from both urban and rural areas say that they often use additional books in teaching English. Only, 2 (13%) teachers say, they always use additional English

books for teaching young learners.

Through the question 5, it was found that almost all teachers (100% from urban areas and 93% teachers from rural areas) believe that they need special training to teach English to young learners.

Q 05: Do you think teachers need special training to teach English?

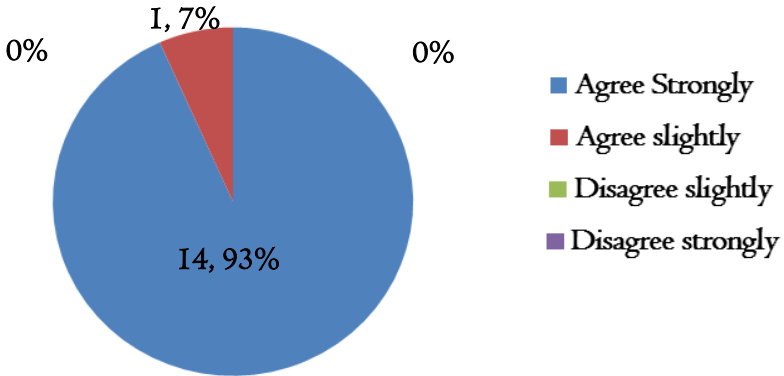


Table I: urban teachers' opinion

Q 05: Do you think teachers need special training to teach English?

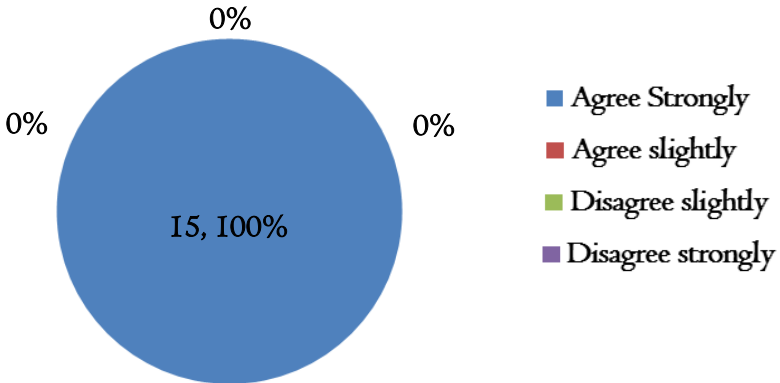


Table 2: rural teachers' opinion

Qualitative research study

In the questionnaire, researcher has used question no 4, 6, 8, 9 and 10 for qualitative research study (see appendix).

In terms of question 4, it was found that both urban and rural schools get same facilities for teaching English and they use almost same materials for young learners.

Material used by urban schools are- Course books, stories, supplementary books, realia, picture card, charts flash card, alphabet card, model chalk and duster. On the other hand, material used by rural schools are- Course books, stories, song, chart, realia, monogram, models, picture card, letter card, sentence chart.

In response to question 6, it is specified that both urban and rural teachers use same activities in the class room. They usually do pair work, group work, games and storytelling. Sometimes they do bingo games and mind games.

Through the analysis of question 8, it is found that among 30 teachers only one teacher is involved with a teacher training forum. But there is nobody who is involved with Bangladesh English Language Teachers' Association (BELTA); even they do not have any idea about BELTA.

For question 9, teachers say that they try to create playful environment in the class room and sometimes they use four skills to teach English. But among 15 teachers only one teacher told that he always try to use four skills. They do not use any special technique or do not innovate anything willingly. When the researcher talked with some teachers informally, they told him that they do not give any special priority though they are teaching a foreign language. They teach English like other subjects.

In terms of question 10 teachers try to overcome their shortcomings by cooperating with other teachers. Some teachers have mentioned results of different public examination to show the supremacy of their school in their area. They think that public examination results are ultimate evidences of better English language teaching.

Finding in terms of central research questions

- The quality of govt. primary school teachers in rural and urban areas is almost same. Most of the newly appointed teachers have honors and masters degree.

- For selecting material and activity, all teachers have similar preferences. They generally use course books, pictures, charts as material. They use role play, pair work group work, storytelling as activity.
- Though teachers in rural and urban areas have the same qualification, rural schools have a shortage teachers. When the researcher talked with rural teachers, they told that they have 4-5 teachers but most of the time 1-2 teachers are involved with non-academic tasks like, voter listing, national immunization campaigning etc. They told the observer that sometimes one teacher takes 2-3 classes at the same time. Interestingly, when the researcher went Manikgonj for data-collection, it was found that one school remained closed for Vitamin 'A' campaign as the teachers were involved in this campaign.
- From informal communication with both rural and urban teachers it was found that rural teachers are overburdened with different non-academic works. Rural teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with having to cope with non-academic tasks. They told the researcher that, though they want to give their full concentration on teaching but most of the time they do have time to teach the students. They also say students show interest in learning English when teachers teach well. One teacher from Manikgonj says that children show curiosity when they get something new. Since, teachers take so many classes and do extra works; they cannot focus on English language teaching.
- Some teachers (urban and rural) express their dissatisfaction over salary structure. They think that they are low paid since they are involved with academic and non-academic activities.
- Some rural teachers have raised question about the quality of teacher's trainer. They say after taking only three months training some teachers become trainer. They mention that the quality of some trainers is lower than trainee.
- All teachers say that they should have more training in English language teaching. They think more training will give them more exposure to the language.

- Both rural and urban primary schools do not have adequate facilities in teaching English. An interesting factor is that materials that they use during training period for example, video streaming; they cannot use those materials in real class room.
- In urban schools the number of casual attendance is higher than rural schools. Only children of lower class families go to school in urban areas; but in rural areas almost all levels of children go to primary schools since the number of kindergartens, private schools are inadequate in rural areas.
- Most of the teachers from rural areas say that parents do not show any interest about the performance of their children. Children get minimum encouragement from parents. Parents consider going school as waste of time. On the other hand, in urban areas educational expenses are very high.

Conclusion

Before starting the research, the researcher thought that he would be able to locate a big divide between rural and urban government primary school education. The focus was on materials, activities, techniques which are used in primary school for young learners in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. The researcher also draws attention to the quality and training of teachers, and different development programs of the government and other organizations in the development of English language teaching of primary schools. But, after finishing the field work and informal interview of teachers, he did not find that many differences. May be it is the result of government efforts in increasing the quality of primary education though the implementation of different goals especially English language teaching. Not only government but other non-government and international organizations are also taking measures which have reduced the gap in the last couple of years. In this research work rural primary school teachers showed dissatisfaction over the inadequacy of teachers and their work. On the other hand, urban teachers raised their voice against the inadequate financial facilities for primary school teachers. Therefore, if the government and concerned ministries are willing to take the necessary steps, it is possible to improve and maximize the educational facilities of English language teaching in both urban and rural areas.

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Appendix

Appendix-A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire for Teachers:

I am going to carry out a research on **Teaching English to Young Learners in Rural and Urban areas of Bangladesh**. In this regard, I need your response in the questionnaire. Your response will be based on your teaching experience, students' performance in the class room and facilities of your school. So, I would like request you to fill out the questionnaire. Your response will be kept absolutely confidential. Thank you for your kind cooperation. (আমি **বাংলাদেশের শহর ও গ্রাম অঞ্চলের খুদে শিক্ষার্থীদের ইংরেজি শিক্ষা** শীষক একটি গবেষণা করতে যাচ্ছি, এজন্য আপনাদের মূলবান মতামত একান্ত প্রয়োজন। তাই আমি আপনাকে অনুরোধ করব আপনার শিক্ষকতার অভিজ্ঞতার, শ্রেণীকক্ষে ছাত্রছাত্রীদের অংশগ্রহন এবং আপনার বিদ্যালয়ের সুযোগ সুবিধার উপর ভিত্তি করে নিম্নলিখিত প্রশ্নাবলি উত্তর দিতে। আপনার উত্তরের যথাযথ গোপনীয়তা রক্ষা করা হবে। আপনার সহযোগীতার জন্য একান্ত ধন্যবাদ।)

Note:

- Children from class one to five are called young learners (প্রথম থেকে পঞ্চম শ্রেণীর ছাত্রছাত্রীদের খুদে শিক্ষার্থী বলা হয়)।
- All questions are related to English language teaching (সব প্রশ্নই ইংরেজি শিক্ষার সাথে সম্পর্কিত).
- You can give answers in Bangla or English (আপনি বাংলা অথবা ইংরেজি যেকোন ভাষায় উত্তর দিতে পারবেন).

Personal information:

School(বিদ্যালয়):.....

District (জেলা):.....

Teaching experience(শিক্ষকতার অভিজ্ঞতা):.....Year (বছর)

Highest degree obtained (সর্বোচ্চ ডিগ্রী)

Teacher's Training (শিক্ষকের ট্রেনিং): If you have training, then write own the name of training, Institute of training (যদি আপনার কোনো ট্রেনিং থাকে তাহলে আপনার ট্রেনিং-এর নাম, ট্রেনিং-এর প্রতিষ্ঠান এর নাম লিখেন):

1.

Year of receiving training:.....

Length of Training:.....

2.

Year of receiving training:

Length of Training:.....

Which class do you teach? (আপনি কোন শ্রেণীর ক্লাস নেন?).....

Questions for the teachers (শিক্ষকদের জন্য প্রশ্নাবলি):

1. Do you think students get any interest to learn English in their young age? (আপনি কি মনে করেন কম বয়সে ইংরেজি শিক্ষায় ছাত্রছাত্রীরা কোনো আগ্রহ দেখায়?)
A. Always B. Often C. Sometimes D. Rarely E. Never

2. Do you think students in your school get adequate facilities to learn English language? (আপনি কি মনে করেন আপনার বিদ্যালয়ের ছাত্রছাত্রীরা ইংরেজি শিক্ষার জন্য পর্যাপ্ত সুযোগ সুবিধা পায়?)
A. Always B. Often C. Sometimes D. Rarely E. Never

3. Do you follow any special technique to teach English to children in the classroom? (আপনি কি শিশুদের ইংরেজি শিক্ষার জন্য কোন বিশেষ কৌশল অনুসরণ করেন?)
A. Always B. Often C. Sometimes D. Rarely E. Never

4. What materials (example: coursebooks, stories, video, supplementary books, realia etc.) do you use to teach English to students in your classroom? (ছাত্রছাত্রীদের ইংরেজি পড়াতে আপনি কোন কোন উপকরণ ব্যবহার করেন?)
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5. Do you follow other supplementary/ additional books to teach English to young students? (আপনি কি ইংরেজি পড়াতে কোন সহায়ক বা অতিরিক্ত বই অনুসরণ করেন?)
A. Always B. Often C. Sometimes D. Rarely E. Never

6. What activities do you follow to teach students in your classroom? (আপনার শ্রেণীকক্ষে ছাত্রছাত্রীদের পড়াতে আপনি কোন কোন কার্যক্রম অনুসরণ করেন?) Example: Role play, pair work, group work, storytelling, games etc.

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7. Do you think teachers need special training to teach English? (আপনি কি মনে করেন ছাত্রছাত্রীদের পড়ানোর ক্ষেত্রে শিক্ষকদের বিশেষ কোন ট্রেনিং-এর প্রয়োজন আছে?)

A. Strongly agree B. Strongly disagree

8. Are you a member of any teacher’s training forum? If yes then write down the name of the forum? (আপনি কি কোন শিক্ষক ট্রেনিং ফোরামের সাথে যুক্ত? যদি হ্যাঁ হয় তাহলে ফোরামের নাম লিখুন।)

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9. Is there any distinguishing feature that is used to teach English to young learners at your school? If yes, what are those? (আপনার বিদ্যালয়ে খুদে শিক্ষার্থীদের ইংরেজি পড়াতে কি কোনো স্পেশাল বৈশিষ্ট্য ব্যবহার করা হয়? যদি হ্যাঁ হয় তাহলে সেগুলো কি কি?)

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10. Do you think students from your school learn English better than other school? If yes, why do you think so? (আপনি কি মনে করেন আপনার বিদ্যালয়-এর ছাত্রছাত্রীরা অন্য বিদ্যালয়-এর ছাত্রছাত্রীদের চেয়ে ভাল ইংরেজি শিখে? যদি হ্যাঁ হয় তাহলে আপনি কেন তা মনে করেন?)

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