

COMPLEXITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL: A STUDY OF FOUR COLLEGES IN BOGURA DISTRICT, BANGLADESH

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the challenges of English language teaching in the Bogura district, Bangladesh. Although Bogura is advanced in establishing educational institutions and trades, it is still lagging in respect of the quality and consequence of English language teaching in higher secondary education. In comparison to the other subject, it seems much more difficult for both teachers and learners. Therefore, the problems of English language learning have been listed, and the result of class observation of colleges in the Bogura district has been presented. To do this study, a descriptive research design, quantitative method, and questionnaires are used. The present findings opine that the majorities depend on the exam system to just pass the exam and there is no equal chance to be skilled in four skills of the English language students. The lacking of teachers has also been detected. However, the study attempts to illuminate a scenario of the English teaching system as well as the problems and prospects of English language learning and teaching in higher secondary education.

Keywords: Teaching, English, Complexity, Higher secondary

1. Introduction

Language is a systematic way of communication. There are approximately 6,500 languages in the world. English is a kind of language that has been used in every country since the middle age of the 18th century. English is a well-known universal language of education, science, technology, computer, tourism, diplomacy, world literature, philosophy, commerce, aviation, and as well as communication (Sharma, 2021). Giri (2014) asserts that English has been playing the role of lingua franca. As English is an international language, and it is the language of communication, modern technology, media, trade, and higher education, it is really important to build the skill in this language. Biswas says (2018) that English is now a vital chapter for the people of Bangladesh, covering from everyday life to education and profession. This language proficiency depends on practice. According to Hamid & Honan (2012), approximately 17 million children are studying English, Bangladesh is one of the largest populations in the world learning English as a foreign or second language. Most recently, the government of Bangladesh instructs English as a second language through its curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2010). As it is a foreign language, students must be

followed some processes to be capable of this language. Proficiency in the English language is influential for higher secondary learners because after this stage they have to attend higher education. This level is not considered the conclusion of the secondary level, but rather as grounding for a four-year college or university (Islam & Hashim, 2019). The significance of this education or shortage of it is felt during the person's life; so, this level of learning should be utilized to make the skill in the English language. But the problem is that the system of this country's education is not up to the mark. The proficiency in speaking and writing is not quite good (Shawlin, 2019). So, we have to think about the betterment of English language learners, especially in the higher secondary levels. For this reason, the challenges need to be addressed to find a solution. The researchers have tried to identify some complexities that can be useful to cope with this concern.

Bangladesh has been known as a monolingual country from the time of our independence in 1971, Bangla is the only national and official language (Faquire, 2010). Therefore, Bangla is being used for daily communication. In Bangladesh; Governor-General Lord William Bentinck introduced the English language in 1835. At first, it was not accepted, and then Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord Macaulay received Governor General's approval in 1835. After that, the students of Bangladesh need to learn English for almost twelve years but the proficiency in speaking or writing is not satisfactory. As a result, English always fails in public exams. In Bangladesh, students need to learn the English for Today series for their secondary level and Higher Secondary level, but it is a traditional method to teach English with this book. There is found a real shortage of competent English teachers in Bangladesh, especially in Bogura. Most school teachers complete their graduates only, and they are not so qualified to teach English because one gets just a degree without studying proper English or without securing qualifying marks in it. But the condition at the Higher Secondary level is slightly better than the secondary level in our country. Higher Secondary level educators at least have an M.A degree in English. But the problem is to be concerned that their courses are oriented toward literature rather than language. And it is hardly possible to get a degree in English without having reasonable proficiency in the language. But the real concern is that teachers are not trained in their specific study zone. An untrained teacher cannot teach language efficiently at any level in any part of education. English Language teaching is very important because for better welfare it will prove that HSC level students will get the benefit to become finesse English learners (Shawlin, 2019). Another thing is to use only the GTM method in the class to teach them the English language through grammar rules. Though, CLT is introduced for communicatively practicing English in 2001 (Siddiqua, 2016).

However, NCTB has taken some initiatives in their textbook for the progress of the students, but the sorrowful thing is that this initiative is not properly accepted by the teacher. Firstly, they have added some approaches like CLT. In 2001, CLT was introduced to the HSC level learners and gave them the scope to practice the English language communicatively (Siddiqua, 2016). They believe that through this approach students can do better in their learning. According to the new curriculum, maximum evaluation from primary to higher secondary level will be carried out throughout the

studying period in the educational institutions. This evaluation needs to be done through project work, assignments, pair work, quizzes, sports, poster exhibitions, and co-curriculum programs. Another important thing is that NCTB gives some recommendations for the teachers which will help them to develop their teaching skills. The teacher will have a significant role in this system. So, our teachers can do better with the updated curriculum which has been given by the NCTB authority. But still, this policy is neglected by the teachers. Curriculum changes often fail because the policymakers do not think about the needs of the teachers (Fullan, 2007).

1.1 Historical Background of English Language in Bangladesh

An appropriate historical overview of the status of English in Bangladesh can be divided into the following sections:

(a) The status and the learning system of English in the pre-independence period, i.e., up to 1947 (colonial period). (b) The status and the education of English in the newly formed Pakistan period (since 1947-1971) or post-colonial period. (c) The grade and the education of English in a newly created Bangladesh (from 1971 onwards) or post-liberation (Islam & Hashim, 2019). These three stages will provide us the authentic knowledge about the installation of the English language. In the first half of the 19th century, British colonial leaders firmly established English as an obligatory curriculum subject by introducing English teaching and learning in this sub-continent (Islam & Hasim, 2019). Since that time English has been a vital element of our national curriculum (Hoque, 1997, p. 130). During the British regulation, English became the mechanism and language of the colonial authority. Colonial administration, education, and commerce used it as their medium of communication. This language was recognized as the major vehicle of development and enlightenment of the western variety. Therefore, in the Indian subcontinent, it became a familiar means of communication between the ruler and the literate class. English maintained that place till the separation of India in 1947 (Hoque, 2017).

In 1947, after the end of British rule, the present region of Bangladesh was placed as one of the two parts of the Dominion of Pakistan- then recognized as East Pakistan. The colonial language received new status and authenticity with the formation of the dominion power. The English language was used as the associative language between East and West Pakistan... (Hamid & Earling, 2016). According to the constitution (1956), English is considered their official language for 20 years (Khatun, 1992). Waseem (1987) asserts that after independence English has revitalization in Pakistan. In 1972, the Constitution of Bangladesh was written and it was stated that from that time on, Bangla will be the language to be used in administration, judiciary, and also in the education sector as the medium of instruction. From 1972, the primary level and tertiary level were deprived to study English, and only at the secondary level maintained as a subject to be learned...but due to a lack of sufficient supply of translated books in Bengali, English needed to be kept in the system of education (Ara, 2020). For this reason, after the liberation of Bangladesh, the new Government took the initiative to

reform the ‘English Language Teaching and Learning System’ (Islam & Hashim, 2019). For this step, this subject has been given special attention to be skilled in it. English is an obligatory subject that obtains an important place in National Curriculum (Islam & Hashim, 2019). At present English, is taught from class one in many primary schools and also in nursery and kindergarten schools unofficially (Khatun, 1992, p. 99). Students study English all their school and college life before putting their name down to university (Ara, 2020). Farooqui (2007) asserts that presently English language teaching in Bangladesh is occupied a significant place due to the ever-growing global demand for English in professional sectors.

Then, the researchers may discuss some methods or approaches to be used to develop this language like the GTM method and CLT approach. GTM method is used widely in our secondary level education. The CLT approach has been applied to improve the quality of English language teaching, but the result is not optimistic for the students.

1.2 Teaching English at the College Level

In Bangladesh, learners are taught English for about twelve years from primary level to HSC level (Shawlin, 2019). But it is a matter of sorrow that the teachers have no concern to develop the skill of the students.

As Banu (2009) asserts that teachers view English as a set of content rather than an assortment of language skills. They try to keep busy with their students by completing those contents instead of giving attention to their language competence. Education management authority keeps the teachers under pressure to complete their large syllabus within a short time. Thereby, competency has been given less importance while the priority is to complete the syllabus or textbook. She again emphasizes students’ comprehensive level and also communicative skills more willingly than rightness and accuracy. Teachers of HSC level basically from village areas break off the young students’ flow of English learning by creating a sense of being exact and grammatically accurate. It makes a sense of being attentive and always about making mistakes which encumbers the learners’ in their language acquisition process.

(Biswas, 2018) states that (Selim & Tasneem, 2011) have also blamed these ELT teachers by saying “When CLT came to Bangladesh the traditional English teacher strongly opposed it because they were not prepared for something new”. The teachers of intermediate level barely feel the consequence of enhancing learners’ speaking and listening skills. Though many days have passed and different methods have been applied but the scenario of our classroom has not been changed. Yet, our teachers feel comfortable to teach the learners according to the traditional method... Therefore, this is the picture of HSC level classes and their learning system of English language teaching.

The desired hypothesizes of the research are as follows: 1. Teaching a foreign language has some complexities. If a teacher starts to teach it, he or she will face some difficulties. 2. As native students are not accustomed to the foreign language, they have some problems to be faced.

2. Literature Review

In higher secondary levels English is considered a compulsory subject. But it is found that at the higher education level there are a lot of obstacles that need to be overcome (Shawlin, 2019).

Over the last few years, the level of standard in English language and teaching has declined alarmingly (Hamid, 2011). In Bangladesh, English language education has always been uncertain, despite various efforts to induce curriculum reform (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). The National Education policy approves communicative English for assisting the present generation to cope with the competitive globalized world (Shawlin, 2019). Karim (2015) says that the National Curriculum Board has modified its curriculum to include the CLT approach at Higher Secondary level and given the emphasis on this approach by adding the four skills of learning a language- listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Yet, no remarkable change has been noticed in the field of English language teaching (Shawlin, 2019). The problem is to lack of implementation. The exam is one of the vital obstacles to giving importance to four skills together. The exam is one of the most significant factors in learning outcomes which motivates learners to practice more on a particular topic, and skills of their assigned exam syllabus (Sultana, 2014). Learning a language and learning behavior are considered similar where the learner requires having an actual stimulus and operant conditioning (Skinner, 1957).

In this regard Exam work for the students is considered one of the most significant stimuli to work hard (Heaton, 1976). At the time a competitive exam like the HSC exam excludes speaking and listening skills it inspires learners to give less importance to those skills in learning (Shawlin, 2019). Writing is also an important issue in language. According to Coffin et al. (2003), students compose writing for many reasons including evaluation, the progress of their critical thinking skills, understanding and memory, the propagation of their education in the classes, the enrichment of their communication skills, and preparation for their future knowledge areas as their profession. Due to the lack of skill, the entire result of the public exam is not acceptable (Suvin, 2020). Another matter is to avoid the direction of NCTB to teach English. Though the textbook is written with communicative thought, they are found unwilling to accept the guideline of the book (Hoque, 2009).

Thus, illuminating multifaceted problems including implementation of CLT, teaching method, incompatible language education strategy, instructional materials in practice, and language teachers' professional improvement, are the most notable negative aspects of English language teaching (Rahman et al., 2019). However, there is a possibility to find the challenges of English language teaching.

3. Research Method

Mason (2011) states that research methodology illuminates an overall research strategy. The research questions are the first section of this chapter. Then, there are details of the research methodology like quantitative methodology. After that, the

researchers have described the research environment, participants, instruments, and data collection procedures. Finally, the researchers have discussed the method of data analysis. They have followed a systematic, and ethical way to complete this analysis. The ending part of this paper also presents an ethical statement that serves as a protection to ensure that the rights of participants are valued in each way the paper is shown.

3.1 Research Design

According to Creswell (2008), research designs are some techniques and procedures to span the decisions from general assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis.

In a word, the research design is an absolute guideline of a study where the direction of data collection, use of instruments, processing, and evaluation of collected data are focused on systematically dealing with the main research questions. In addition, research design leads the researcher with a necessary plan of action and its limitations. The techniques of the quantitative method were used to obtain data from participants. Questionnaires and classroom observation were the main tools that the researchers used in the study. The researchers prepared two sets of questions including close-ended questions for the students and open-ended questions for the teachers. As the goal of the study is to recognize the complexities of teaching English at the higher secondary level in Bogura, a quantitative method is applied to accomplish this study. To conduct our research, the researchers prepared one set of close-ended questionnaires which were 10 in number. Then, they began to search the suitable institutions where they could pursue their studies. As their present living place belongs to Bogura in the Rajshahi division, the four colleges of Bogura have been selected to continue the study. After that, the researchers approached the head of four colleges and requested them to be permitted to carry out their research. After getting the permission a consent form was given to be filled out. Despite some difficulties, the researchers have been able to obtain their information. They gathered their data from college sources to be added to their research.

3.2 Participants

The researchers have only been authorized to work with four specialized English teachers to answer their offering open-ended questions. Then they observed the classes where approximately 30 students were present and they also selected them for giving the close-ended questions of the study. Approximately 85 students have been selected to accumulate data from four colleges in the Bogura district. Though they were unknown to them, they completed their providing information sheet.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The information of the study was collected within one week, using a variety of quantitative methodologies. The researchers managed this information to work for one week where they observed the class and the questions of their research were filled up by

the students and the teachers. In a classroom, the researcher saw the style of teaching, cooperation between student and teacher, and their activities, as well as gather information on teaching methods, textbooks, and teaching materials. Apart from this, the researchers also individually talked with teachers for gathering information about the present learning situation which helped them to observe the class very perfectly.

3.4 Classroom Observation

At present, the researchers observed the classes of four colleges for one week. There, they entered as a student and sat on a bench in a corner of the class to monitor the class. There they found around 30 students in a class but the total number was above 100. The students of those colleges could not take him easily but he tried to adjust himself. Each class lasted 40 to 45 minutes. The maximum students felt very comfortable speaking Bangla in their class activities. For this reason, teachers are accustomed atom to giving their lectures in Bangla. Sometimes they speak in English. When the attendance of the students is high, it is very difficult to manage the class.

4. Discussion

This part shows the present findings of the study. Relevant data is presented in the column charts and pie charts. The findings of the study are graphically presented and then analyzed in the descriptive method. At first, close-ended questions for the students' are noted. Then close-ended questions for the teachers are mentioned. The analysis of the findings is added in the final section of this chapter.

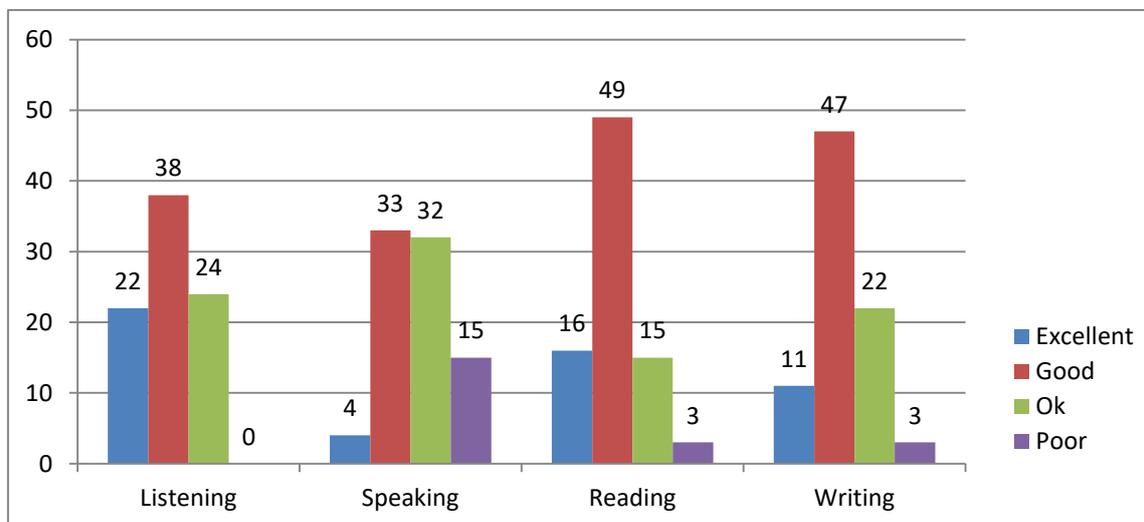


Figure 1: Student's capability in four skills of the English language

The above chart is to show the student's capability in four skills of the English language including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Listening

Approximately 25% of the students are excellent while 44% of the participants are good whereas 28% of the learners are ok and 3% of the pupils are poor at listening. Among them, 2% of the students didn't like to respond.

Speaking

Around 4% of the apprentices assured their excellence whereas 38% of the students are good while 37% of the participants are ok and 17% of the pupils are poor at speaking. Besides, 1% of the learners didn't will to answer.

Reading

About 18% of the students are excellent and 57% of the learners are good at reading. Besides, 17% of the pupils confirmed that they are ok whereas 3% of the participants are poor at reading. Apart from this, 2% of the students didn't want to give their answers.

Writing

This chart delineates that almost 12% of the apprentices are excellent while 55% of students are good at writing. It also reflects that nearly 25% of the learners are ok whereas 3% of them are poor in writing. Moreover, 2% of them have found reluctant to answer.

Moreover, the capability of the learners in spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar are also mentioned here as-

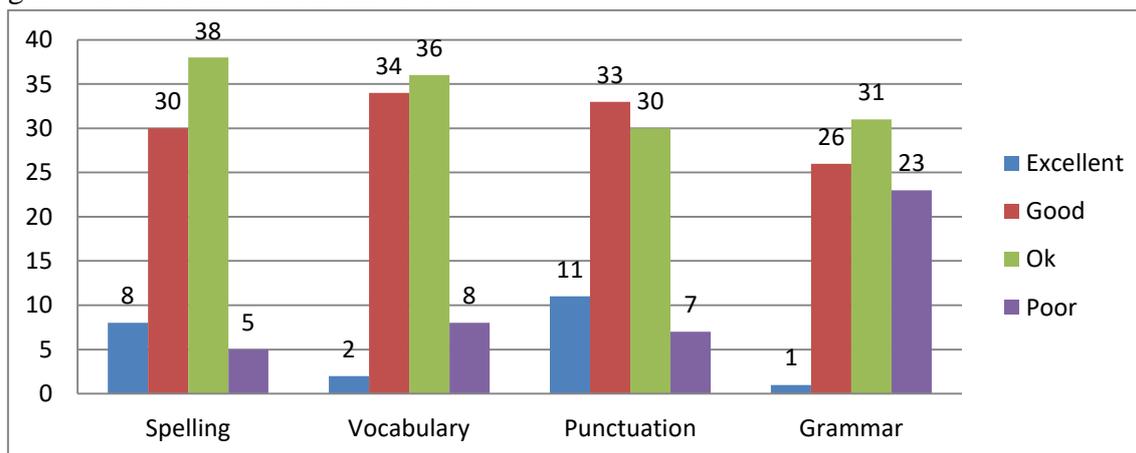


Figure 2: Students' Linguistics Capability Checking

Spelling

Approximately 9% of the learners are excellent while 34% of the students are good whereas 44% of the learners are ok and 5% of the pupils are poor in spelling. Among them, 5% of the students didn't like to react.

Vocabulary

About 2% of the students are excellent and 39% of the learners are good at reading. Besides, 41% of the pupils confirmed that they are ok whereas 9% of the participants are poor in vocabulary. Apart from this, 6% of the students didn't want to give their answers.

Punctuation

This chart delineates that almost 11% of the apprentices are excellent while 33% of students are good at writing. It also reflects that nearly 30% of the participants are ok whereas 7% of them are poor in punctuation. Moreover, 5% of them have found reluctant to reply.

Grammar

Around 1% of the apprentices confirmed their excellence whereas 26% of the students are good while 31% of the learners are ok and 31% of the pupils are poor in grammar. Besides, 5% of the learners didn't will to respond.

Later, some questions have been asked to the students to get their consent of them. The rates of their assent are presented in the pie charts.

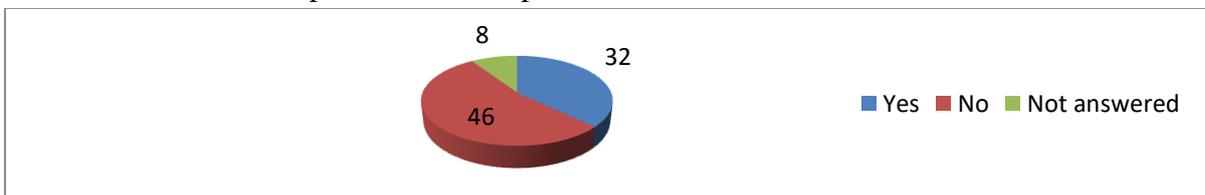


Figure 3: If the students have any idea of the GTM and CLT

Around 53% of the participants said that they were familiar with the term GTM and CLT while 37% of them weren't. Besides, 8% of them were found blank on their answer paper.

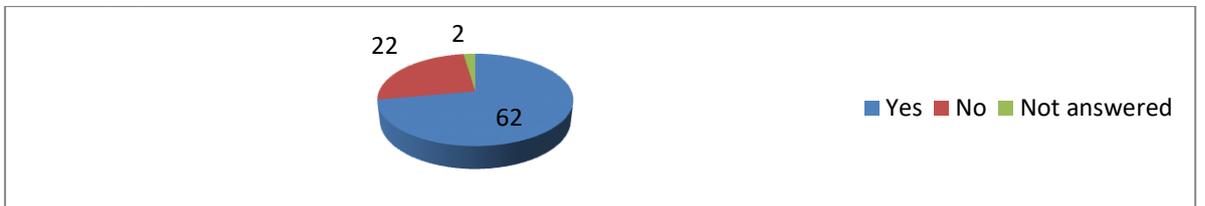


Figure 4: The medium of communication in English class

Nearly 72% of the learners asserted that they communicate in English in class. Besides, 25% of them don't communicate in English in class and 2% of them were reluctant to opine.

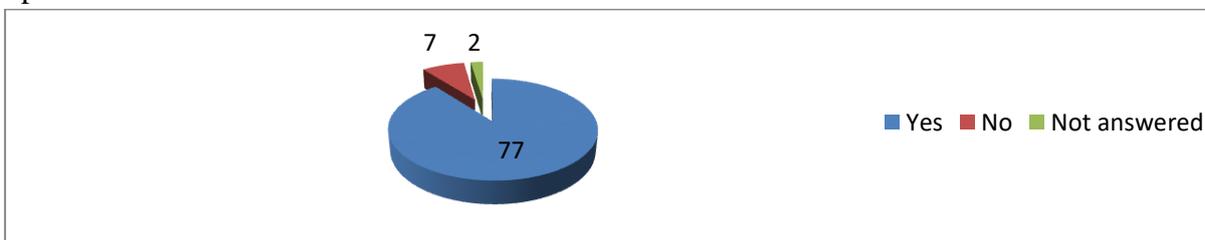


Figure 5: Whether teachers talk in English to the students in class

A maximum number of the apprentices (about 89%) agreed that their teacher talk in English to them in class. Nearly 8% of them gave their different opinion on it and 2% of them were loath to reply.

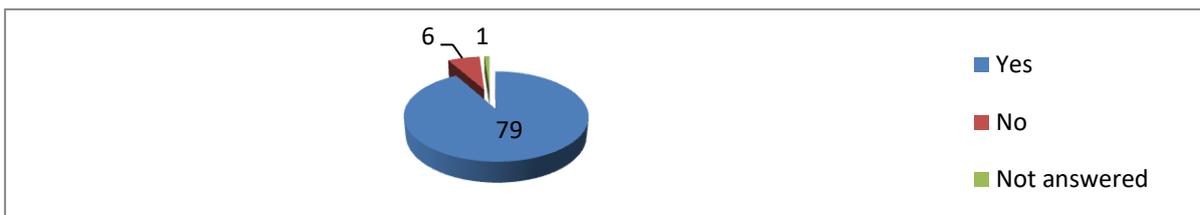


Figure 6: If English teachers offer the students the lesson on the four skills including speaking, listening, reading, and writing

Around 91% of the pupils gave positive comments on it whereas 6% of the learners were found negative and 1% of them remained silent.

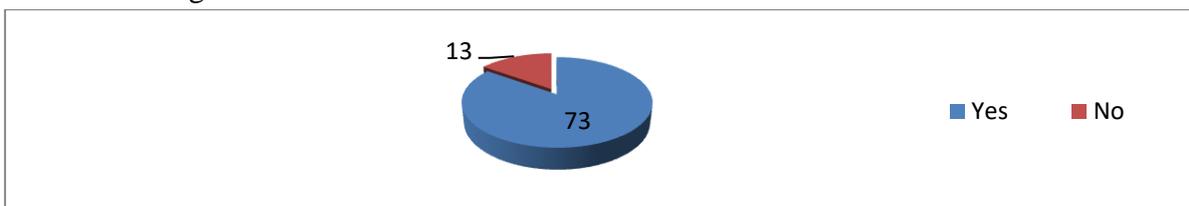


Figure 7: If the teachers motivate the students to develop their English language skill

In this regard, all of the participants gave their views. A large number (about 84%) of them claimed that their teacher motivate them in learning the English language while around 15% of them chose to give negative reactions.

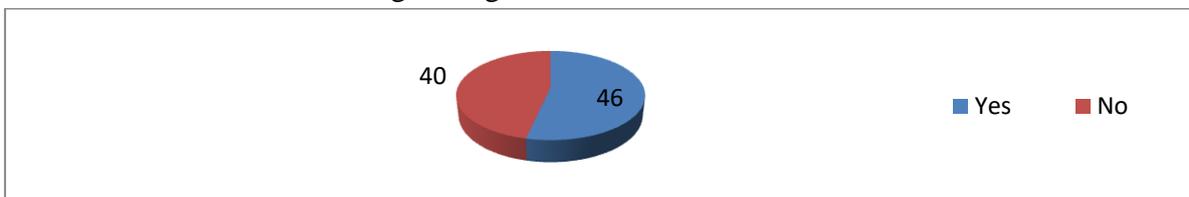


Figure 8: Whether the students think the exam system forces them to remain unskillful in English

Approximately 53% of the learners agreed that they agreed with it, but 46% said they didn't think so.

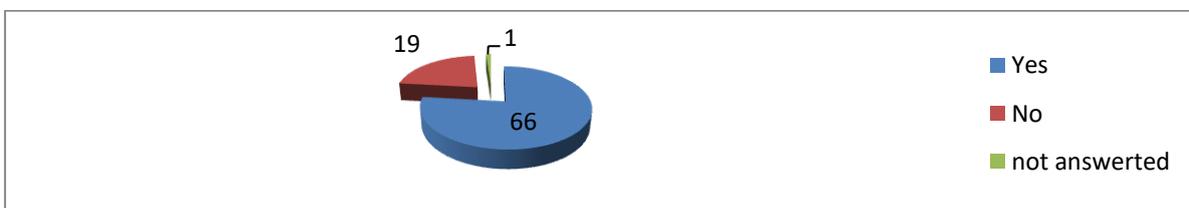


Figure 9: If the learners think that the process of English language teaching is appropriate

The majority (nearly 76%) of the learners answered positively about their opinion but 22% didn't agree with it. Besides fewer students (1%) didn't like to answer.

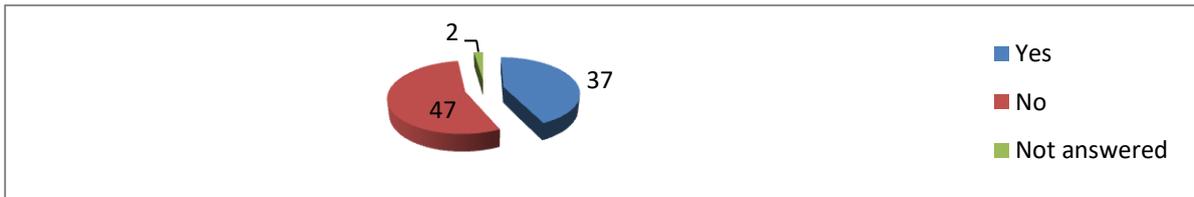


Figure 10: If the students have the fluency in the English language

A large portion of the students (around 54%) couldn't talk fluently in English while 43% of them said yes and 2% of them didn't like to respond.

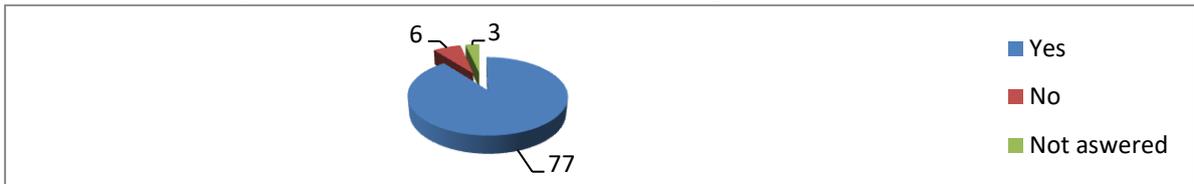


Figure 11: Whether the students think that they are being provided proper guidance to develop their skills in the English language

A maximum number (around 89%) of the apprentices admitted that they are being provided proper guidance to develop their skills in the English language whereas some of the students (about 7%) didn't think so and 3% of them remained quiet.

As English is not our native language, we may have some issues learning and teaching it. The present findings show the language ability of the learners. To be competent in a language, a student must have proper knowledge regarding speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, grammar, etc. The researchers have tried to sort out the issues to gather proper knowledge of the language. To survey, a close-ended question has been served to the learners from various higher education institutions where they put a tick as a choice mark. From that, the ability rate of four skills of language, other information of learners, and lack of teacher and education system will be discussed.

By chart 1, a few students are excellent in the four skills of the language; most of them are good while some of the learners are ok and some of them are poor. But the percentage of speaking skills is being decreased in comparison to other skills. Maximum students opined that they have complexity in speaking.

According to chart 2, Most of the students are ok with spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. The punctuation rate is high in comparison to other skills. Besides, the excellence rate is very low. Some of them are good at these skills.

Students also have given their opinion on the other questions which have been added to the pie charts. Most of them have stated that they don't know about CLT and GTM but they have been given lessons on the four skills, they have been motivated and guided by their teachers but the exam system is not appropriate. Moreover, they think that it's one kind of obstacle in their way of learning. A large portion has admitted they are not fluent in speaking English which is very alarming for us.

Furthermore, our educational institution and teachers also have some shortage which is discussed below-

Teachers' Qualification:

A higher secondary level is considered a preparatory level for higher education. If students make their basics strong, they can shine in life. Therefore, the college section plays an important role to develop learners' basic education. In this regard, the roles of teachers are so effective. If the learners are provided proper guidance, they can illuminate themselves. In the fieldwork, the researchers observed that most of the teachers have M.A. degrees in English but the sorrowful thing is that they don't follow any method and they don't have any proper training in CLT. To tell the very truth, they have no clear conception regarding CLT and GTM. To teach a student a teacher must have adequate knowledge regarding the subject but in this country, it's rare.

Lack of Proper Training:

Teachers train their students to be educated. The lacking of teachers has had a bad impact on the students. In our education system, teachers' responsibility is to guide the students to make a good result in their exams so that teachers have no concern to teach them four skills or give importance to these. Thus, if the teachers are well trained, the students can get the benefits.

When the researchers visited four colleges, they offered to the teachers a paper of open-ended questions. In their answer, most of them wrote that they have no specific training in CLT. Someone didn't know about the scope of training in their field of teaching. They also told us that they didn't get any offer of training in their 10 to 12 years of teaching life.

Even they don't have any proper knowledge of ELT branches such as direct method according to Second language Acquisition (SLA), GTM, phone, morpheme, syntax, and semantics.

Inability to Speak English with Methods

CLT-based learning means Communication-based learning. The interaction between teacher and student in English is a must in Communicative teaching. The selected teachers of the study wrote that they talk but the researchers observed that they don't follow any method or speak according to any method. They just read out the lesson and solve the question of that lesson. Sometimes the students ask the teachers about their study problems, but they ask in Bangla. The survey result also shows that the percentage of speaking fluently is very low. There are no regular conversations between teacher and student. The reason is to avoid the methods of teaching. As they don't pursue any method, students are deprived of creating group discussion, peer discussion, act dialogue, etc. as their class activities. As a result, their speaking and listening skills are not up to the mark.

Short duration and Overloaded Classroom:

At the time of the researcher's observation, they saw the specification of the class which is very short in the comparison of students because the number of the students is above 100. Another important thing is the class hour is around 40 minutes which is very inappropriate with the total number of students. This short session doesn't encourage the students to be friendly or skillful. The teachers have no chance to interact with all of the students during this period and it is very tough work to arrange anything extra activities for the betterment of the learners.

Lack of Preparation for the Class:

In teaching, preparation for the class helps a teacher to provide appropriate lectures and structured learning to the learners. The lack of it makes the environment bewildered. Observations of the classes help the researchers to find this problem. Before starting a class like English class, it is really important to prepare for the class hour. During that time, a teacher has to fill up a student's needs, understand the lesson accurately, give suggestions on that, make the lesson enjoyable, and set some language-related activities. Besides, the students need to prepare the lesson for making their studies fruitful to them. All of these things are absent today. As a result, neither students nor teachers can develop the condition of their studies.

Grammar Based Learning System:

CLT method has been developed to enhance the four skills of the English language and this method is mainly for communicative learning which discourages the learners to use the GTM method. This method mainly teaches the grammatical rules and captures some grammatical items. Thus they know some rules but can't speak fluently and can't use them properly, in their writing. But it is common to run the class by giving grammar-based learning which hinders us to be skilled in the English language.

Insufficient Language Activities:

Most of the learners admitted that their teachers attempt to give a better lesson to them. Yet, we don't get any satisfactory development of the learners because they don't follow the systematic way to teach the students. For example, they don't arrange any language activities including group work, group discussion, peer work, peer discussion, role play, etc.

Lack of Teaching Aids and Library:

Teaching aids and library facilities are a very essential thing for the teaching system. But unfortunately, our colleges have no sufficient facilities for these things. The researchers saw some of the colleges have no whiteboard and markers, they don't provide hand notes to the students, and no projector. For the inadequate number of books in the library, students can't get the possibility to enrich their knowledge.

5. Conclusion

English is considered our official language but our students face some complexities in learning. Therefore, it seems very tough to teach them fairly. The main fact is that the curriculum of CLT is still far from being implemented which is a matter of tremendous sadness for us. The students of Bogura are quite good at learning as the findings have been shown but they lag to achieve fluency in English, reading comprehension, listening power, and systematic approach to learning. Lack of proper instructions, sufficient time management for each class, interaction between learners and teachers using the English language, applying specific methods of teaching, and proper training are the vital reasons to be found. These are the core barriers to English language teaching.

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