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EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH: PERSPECTIVES FROM LEARNERS AND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH VERSION SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of introducing English Version schools in Bangla medium schools is government's concern on the nation's human capital development. To achieve the standard of a developed country, both national and foreign curricula are implemented in the educational sector in Bangladesh. This paper emphasizes the difficulties that English language learners face in comprehending the language since EV schools do not provide enough opportunity for real-world experience and reflective activities. This research seeks to examine the challenges that students have while utilizing and comprehending English vocabulary and phrases in the context of their coursework. A qualitative data analysis approach was used to capture the

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thoughts and opinions of ten students from class X in five different English Version schools. The findings of this survey reveal the participants' attitudes, opinions, and interests on the difficulties, issues, and prospects of English-language institutions. While these schools adhere to the national curriculum, they mostly use English as the medium of teaching. Furthermore, this research has significant pedagogical implications for individuals learning the English language, as well as for instructors and professionals in the field.

Keywords: English Version Institution in Bangladesh, National Curriculum, English Moi

INTRODUCTION

To learn the language effectively, our textbooks used in schools and colleges are designed following National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) prescribed curriculum. Under the Ministry of Education in Bangladesh, education system has been divided into two sections: the traditional 'Bengali medium' schools and the 'English version'. However, there is perhaps a discrimination between the different education systems when it comes to the practice of all necessary skills needed to perform well in English. English as a lingua franca is used almost everywhere around the globe as a mode of communication and contact with people for different purposes. So, English is taught and learnt as foreign or second language for communication, higher study and getting a good job etc. In Bangladesh, English is taught as foreign language and is considered as compulsory from primary to tertiary education (Moni, 2021; NCTB, 2021; Taz, 2021).

The objective for introducing English Version Schools in Bangla medium schools is government's concern on the nation's human capital development in order to achieve the standard of a developed country, as well as an early preparation to compete in the era of globalization. However, this study aims to explore the challenges among the secondary students studying in English Version Institution in our country (Taz, 2021).

Background of the Study

English version schools in Bangladesh provide an educational framework combining the national curriculum with English as the language of teaching.

These institutions are kept under the framework of the national curriculum but serve students who want a greater exposure to global education standards.

Over the last ten years, English version schools in Bangladesh have been progressively growing in count. According to statistics of 2022, there are several hundred schools have English version all throughout the nation, mostly concentrated in cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, and Sylhet. Although exact figures vary, under different educational boards there are approximately 2.2% English versions of institutions all around (BANBEIS, 2022).

English version schools usually provide instruction beginning in Class 1 (Grade 1) and running through Class 12 (Grade 12). From Class 1 to Class 5, the education starts at the elementary level; it then proceeds through the junior secondary level from Class 6 to Class 8; the secondary level from Class 9 to Class 10; and ends at the upper secondary level from Class 11 to Class 12. To equip children for the main level, certain schools could also provide pre-primary education (NCTB, 2021).

Although the English version of the National Curriculum, Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh provides the textbooks used, the curriculum in English version schools is compliant with the national curriculum. With the main distinction being the method of education, these textbooks cover all disciplines—including Bangla, English, mathematics, science, social science, and others. The material stays the same, just as in the Bangla edition textbooks, thereby guaranteeing students's readiness for national tests (NCTB, 2021; Taz, 2021).

English version schools welcome students from all backgrounds. Though admissions may sometimes occur at higher levels depending on the availability of seats and the school's policies, generally students are accepted at the entry-level, Class 1. Usually, admission calls for passing an entrance test—especially for higher grades. Usually keeping to the national curriculum, the schools serve moderate to upper-middle class learners who want an English-medium education (NCTB, 2021).

Research Problem

English is used worldwide and has been popular for a few centuries which results in different varieties of English. People across the world are getting habituated with these diversities. In our country, despite using English in almost all sectors, we face controversies over non-native norms, standards, practices and attitudes. Both national and foreign curricula are implemented in the educational sector in Bangladesh. This research seeks to examine the challenges that students have while utilizing and comprehending English vocabulary and phrases in the context of their coursework.

Learning does not happen by only passive receipt of information (Chand, 2023). In the context of the challenges faced by learners and teachers in English Version schools, constructivist theory provides a robust framework for understanding these issues. The research problem could be framed as exploring how the lack of authentic, experiential learning opportunities and reflective practices in EV schools contributes to the challenges learners face in constructing their understanding of English.

Additionally, it may also address how instructors could find it difficult to use constructivist techniques in a system that does not entirely support these methods, therefore creating a gap between theory and practice. Through constructivist theory, the research might provide insights on how English language instruction in EV schools could be strengthened to better fit the ideas of active, experiential, and socially constructed learning.

CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY AND ITS APPLICATION TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Constructivist Theory Overview

Psychologists like Jean Piaget (D. 1980) and Lev Vygotsky (D. 1934) were constructivists. Their theory claims that learning is an active and creative process. By use of experiences, connections, and reflection, learners create or develop their own understanding and knowledge of the world. Learning does not happen by only passive receipt of information. This strategy goes against

the view that learners are blank slates; they wait for the teachers to load with knowledge (Access & Sardar, 2023; Chand, 2023).

Constructivism holds that learning is a process of meaning construction from experience. Not just handed on from teacher to student, knowledge is actively formed by the learner when they mix new content with their present cognitive structures. This method that information is created is much shaped by the social and cultural environment in which education takes place (Chand, 2023).

Major Proponents of this Theory

Jean Piaget: Piaget introduced the concept of cognitive constructivism. It suggests that learners build their own knowledge through processes of assimilation and accommodation of their experiences. Piaget emphasized the importance of active engagement in learning, where learners interact with the world around them and construct new meaning (Liu & Matthews, 2005).

Lev Vygotsky: Later, Vygotsky expanded on Piaget's theory of learning with his sociocultural theory. Vygotsky underscores the importance of social interaction and cultural tools in the learning process. He introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the difference between what a learner can do without help and what they can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner. This idea highlights the role of teachers, peers, and social context in the construction of knowledge (Access & Sardar, 2023).

Jerome Bruner: Bruner (D. 2016) further developed the constructivist approach by emphasizing the role of language and narrative in learning. He argued that learning is an active process where learners construct new ideas based on their current and past knowledge. Bruner also highlighted the importance of scaffolding, where teachers support learners by providing temporary structures to help them achieve higher levels of understanding (O'donovan, 2021).

Application to English Language Learning

Above theories of cognitive constructivism, socio cultural theory and scaffolding can be applied very well in English language acquisition of EV schools. Constructivist theory suggests that learners acquire language skills most effectively through authentic, meaningful experiences that allow them to engage with the language in context. This means that learners construct their understanding of English not merely by memorizing vocabulary or grammar rules, but by using the language in real-life situations, reflecting on their usage, and gradually internalizing the language structures.

Several key ideas emerge from this constructivist approach to language learning:

Learning through Experience: English language learners benefit from immersive experiences where they can use the language in meaningful ways. For example, activities like role-playing, simulations, and project-based learning allow students to construct their understanding of English. By doing so, they can apply English to real-world scenarios (Access & Sardar, 2023; Kilpatrick, 1953).

Reflection: Reflective practice is crucial in language learning. After engaging in language use, learners reflect on their experiences, analyze their language output, and adjust. This reflective process helps them internalize language rules and structures. This is how their learning becomes more effective (Ha, 2022).

Social Interaction: Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction is particularly relevant in language learning. Classroom conversations, collaborative tasks, and peer feedback sessions allow learners to construct their knowledge of English. Learners need to learn from others and receive support in social contexts (Lantolf et al., 2014; Marks & Fraley, 2007).

Cultural Context: Learning a language within a cultural context is also important. Language is deeply intertwined with culture. Understanding the cultural context and pragmatics of English is crucial for learners and teachers. This means that language learning should not be isolated from the

cultural contexts in which the language is used (Karlik, 2023; Ordóñez Procel et al., 2023).

Constructivist Perspectives on Learning English

Several scholars have specifically applied constructivist principles to language learning:

David Ausubel emphasized the role of prior knowledge in learning new concepts, which is crucial in language learning. He suggested that learners anchor new language concepts to what they already know, which helps in better retention and understanding (“Learning Theories: Ausubel’s Learning Theory,” 2012).

John Dewey, a proponent of experiential learning, argued that education should be grounded in real-life experiences. In the context of learning English, this means that students learn best when they can relate language lessons to their personal experiences and use the language in practical, everyday situations (Kilpatrick, 1953; Roberts, 2003).

Krashen’s Input Hypothesis aligns with constructivist ideas, proposing that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language input that is slightly above their current level of competence (i+1). This challenges learners to construct meaning and advance their language skills (Senturk, 2024).

The Present Study

In this study, the researcher attempts to analyse the ongoing developmental endeavour of Bangladeshi education system, namely, English version sections in Bangla medium schools of Bangladesh. Although a remarkable number of Bangladeshi schools has involved themselves in this attempt of immersion education, there is still inadequate amount of research on benefits and losses of the project ‘English version’ taken by Bangladesh Govt. This paper discloses the challenges, thoughts and actions taken by the students of English Version Institutions of Bangladesh. This paper answers the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges the students as well as teachers face in English Version classroom?
2. What strategies do they use to address the challenges experienced in an English-language classroom?

LITERATURE REVIEW

History and Definition of English Version

In 1960s, Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) became familiar with the names as “English-teaching school” (Banu, R., & Sussex, 1999) and “National curriculum in English medium” (Al-Quaderi, G. G., & Al Mahmud, 2010), which came into use across West and East Pakistan (today’s Bangladesh) in response to public demand (Hasan, 2011).

English Version section follows national “Bangladesh Textbook Board Curriculum” but utilizes English as the medium of instruction (Rahman & Pandian, 2018) and under this name, this section has been perceived and employed all over the country as a compromise between desirable (higher) standards of international (English-medium) schools and affordable (but lower) standards of Bangla-medium schools (Moni, 2021; Rahman & Pandian, 2018).

The use of English as the primary language of teaching throughout the foundational stages of school, known as immersion education, is being critically examined by researchers. The references used are (Bialystok, 2012) and (Caccavale, 2007). UNESCO supports vernacular education as the most appropriate method of teaching all topics and recommends mother-tongue-based multilingual education to accomplish the objectives of “Education for All” (Lor, 2007).

Clear and intelligible communication is crucial for successful education, making the language of instruction vital to the learning process. Mother tongue-based teaching is essential for giving children early access to education and allowing them to engage in learning based on their developing abilities (Unesco, 2011).

Nevertheless, the current prevalence of utilizing English in Bangladeshi institutions indicates that there are various obstacles that need sufficient attention. It is critical to prioritize classroom-based assessment and integrate it into the overall assessment system, since the classroom plays a vital role in facilitating effective learning in an English language environment, such as in Bangladesh (Moni, 2021).

Present State of English Version in Bangladesh

Developing nations, such as Bangladesh, often have a common practice of making English a mandatory subject in formal education from the very beginning, even if there is a lack of competent instructors. An extensive analysis of many publications on education systems in different Least Developed Countries (LDCs) highlights notable features of the English version portion in Bangladesh. Primarily, the objective is to provide high-quality education aligned with the national curriculum. Furthermore, parents like the use of English as the primary language of teaching due to its effectiveness in facilitating knowledge of both curricular material and the English language. Furthermore, a significant portion of students have a middle-income social position, despite the fact that many of them face financial difficulties while trying to satisfy their basic needs with an average pay. Lastly, these schools are considered to be quasi-English-medium, which means that code-switching in the classroom is a common occurrence for both instructors and students (Rahman et al., 2019).

In Bangladesh, the English Version of education requires learners to comprehend the subject content in English, and it necessitates instructors with sufficient English competence who are willing to work for a little price. This presents a chance for young and driven teams of instructors who are receptive to innovative technology, methodologies, and teacher-student interactions (Golam & Tatsuya, 2019).

Challenges of Learning English as Second Language

In a constrained educational setting, learning materials are essential objects or resources that assist in the process of acquiring knowledge or skills. While

books are indeed crucial, they are insufficient on their own. Additionally, audio tools are required. Regrettably, students of the English language are never exposed to accurate pronunciation by a native speaker. Consequently, the majority of language acquisition is flawed. Students possess books for reading, but they lack knowledge about the accurate pronunciation of certain terms. Therefore, how can a learner acquire knowledge of word pronunciation? The student should be given the chance to receive proper pronunciation guidance from their instructor. Learning a second language primarily involves acquiring the ability to speak and understand it. However, learners cannot achieve a high degree of expertise unless they possess the ability to use the target language effectively within the framework of the target culture. Moreover, to acquire a practical and comprehensive understanding of language, learners must possess the ability to accurately infer the intended meaning of their conversation partners. When the L1 and L2 cultures exhibit common characteristics, the assumptions made play a role in the learning process. Nevertheless, when there are significant differences between both cultures, the process of learning becomes jeopardized (Raju & Joshith, 2017).

In comparison between spoken and written English, acquiring fluency in a foreign language is comparatively simpler than mastering its written form, grammatical rules, and the skill of writing it. It is thus unsurprising that Indians excel at spoken English compared to written English (Neha, 2019).

Common expressions and dialects also present challenges. This issue arises from the usage of informal language, namely slang, which is frequently employed in everyday interactions. By immersing yourself in the local culture, you will increase your opportunities to learn and adapt. Therefore, one may use popular culture such as television shows or radio programs to enable the student to discern indicators such as vocal intonation or nonverbal signals (Usman, 2019).

In addition, inexperienced instructors present another significant challenge. The majority of instructors lack knowledge on how to effectively introduce a new language to students based on their individual interests. Teachers sometimes struggle to effectively convey the aspects of a second

language, particularly when they themselves come from a different academic background and are teaching English in the classroom. In our secondary classrooms, the English instructors do not have a background in English as a subject. This consistently generates issues among learners. Notably, rural kids had a greater awareness of the impact of 'Attitude' and 'Teacher's Competence' on their difficulties in learning English as a Second Language compared to urban learners (Raja & Selvi, 2011).

Further, restricted competence among instructors is another issue. Regrettably, the majority of high school instructors lack proficiency in the English language and are incapable of delivering oral instruction in English. Consequently, English is taught to learners mostly via written language, although this method does not guarantee complete mastery of the language. The most effective method of English instruction is oral language teaching in the classroom. It provides an opportunity for learners to listen to the target language. Consequently, the student will be required to communicate in English, which will enhance their ability to acquire the language (Raju & Joshith, 2017).

Finally, the absence of motivation significantly hampers language learning. Cook (Mahadi & Jafari, 2012) noted that language acquisition differs across learners and emphasized three key aspects that affect and impact the process of learning a second language. The three factors that influence this are age, personality, and motivation. Additionally, he asserts that motivation is the primary determinant in the acquisition of a second language. According to Betal & Banerjee (1996), motivation in second language acquisition is a multifaceted concept that may be described by two factors: the learners' desire to communicate and their views towards the second language community. They hold the belief that when learners see the necessity of speaking a second language to connect with people or achieve certain objectives, they will be motivated and encouraged to acquire proficiency and mastery in it. This aligns with (R. Ellis, 1994) perspective, which defines motivation as learners' deliberate effort to acquire a second language due to their inherent need or strong inclination to do so.

Finding Learners' Motivation

Engaging instructional methods in the classroom are crucial for maintaining student motivation and fostering their comprehension of teachings, as well as developing their expressive skills (Ariatna, 2016). Learners' motivation originates inside, but it is also necessary for the instructor to boost it in the classroom.

According to BANBEIS, there is a progressive increase in both the number and quality of teaching experts. The inclusion of English version parts significantly enhances children's comprehension of the topics and improves their proficiency in the English language. Most likely, this is because families, teachers, and the whole society see it as beneficial for learners to acquire proficiency in a second language, enabling them to become bilingual and bi-literate.

Context of English Version Classroom

English is a compulsory language for communication and teaching at English Version Institutions, even when the students and professors lack fluency in English. English is a mandatory subject and when it comes to teaching English, (Shahzada, G., Ghazi, S. R., & Khan, 2012) argue that the adoption of the Grammar Translation technique hinders students' progress in learning the language. Additionally, they assert that the schools do not prioritize the teaching and practice of communicative English, instead placing greater emphasis on teaching English texts. In addition, (Farooqui, 2014) asserts that the inadequate English competence of both instructors and learners leads to the use of Bengali for classroom instructions (Ali & Walker, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This section provides a comprehensive description of the research technique, including all the necessary components for doing the study. The objective of the research is to analyze the challenges and obstacles that students of the English Version Institution encounter in comprehending the subject matter specified by NCTB. A study design serves as a structured plan for gathering and analyzing data (Bryman, 2012). This study was conducted using a

qualitative research technique, where data was gathered via interviews and observations.

Participants

The participants have been taken from Secondary School of English Version Institution. The study has been conducted on 10 participants from Class X. This study adopts a qualitative multiple case study method that focuses on the actual information collected from the participants' interview.

Participants' Profile

Sl.	Name	Gender	Class	Name of the Institution
1.	Afifa	Female	X	Secondary school
2.	Rubel	Male	X	Secondary school
3.	Rebeca	Female	X	Secondary school
4.	Sajjad	Male	X	Secondary school
5.	Tamim	Male	X	Secondary school
6.	Farhan	Male	X	Secondary school
7.	Tanjim	Female	X	Secondary school
8.	Selina	Female	X	Secondary school
9.	Rokhsana	Female	X	Secondary school
10.	Momtaz	Female	X	Secondary school

Data Collection

Individual participants were interviewed, and data were also obtained via classroom observation. During the interview, the researcher sought to ascertain the difficulties encountered by students learning in the English Version. During the interview, the questions were posed in a candid and relaxed manner, allowing the participants to feel at ease in providing their answers. By following this approach, it is feasible to get genuine data. During the interviews, both Bengali and English were used to create a comfortable and informal atmosphere for the participants. This approach aimed to maximize the amount of information extracted while minimizing the chances of the participants losing interest towards the conclusion of the interview. The

interviews were taped and transcribed for the purpose of analysis and citation of the findings. Upon analyzing the responses to the interview questions, we will identify the primary challenges that students of the English Version Institution often encounter in our nation.

Data Analysis

The researcher has opted to use the qualitative thematic analysis framework (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) to assemble and analyze the data gathered in this study. The data obtained from the interviews were examined using the researcher's hypothesis and corroborated by current studies examined in the literature.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher guarantees meticulous adherence to ethical considerations while performing the study and gathering data. Participants were not compelled to provide interviews or respond in a pre-determined manner. Furthermore, in order to safeguard privacy, pseudonyms are used for the participants and the names of the schools are completely omitted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research seeks to examine the difficulties faced by both students and instructors at English medium institutions while studying texts and comprehending the lesson's message. This section primarily aims to examine and evaluate the perspectives of the participants, using data obtained from interviews and the researcher's observations. This also includes the researcher's own perspective and potential resolutions to the issue.

Facing Difficulties in Understanding English Version Textbooks

It is really challenging to teach and study using a foreign language in a school atmosphere that is not very effective (Galloway et al., 2017). The primary grievances expressed by parents and learners are the inadequate proficiency of instructors in English, ineffective teaching methods, and the low quality of teaching materials. Following a discussion on preliminary inquiries, the researcher inquired about the educational setting at English Version institutions. During the interview, Tamim said that he has embarrassment

while encountering new topics and concepts when studying scientific courses in English Version textbooks (Nur, 2021)

In addition, while he posed pertinent inquiries to the instructors, the majority of the time, the teacher responded by stating that they will address it at a later time, leaving the issue unresolved. Conversely, several instructors argue that the learners are mischievous and that, despite their efforts to be helpful and kind, they are unable to effectively manage the situation.

Another participant, Rebeca, asserts that the authoritative position of a teacher instills fear in us, hindering our ability to ask questions and thereby diminishing opportunities for student-teacher interactions. Furthermore, Farhan, Tanjim, Selina, and other students and instructors assert that the comprehension of English textbooks is contingent upon the students' cognitive capacity. The variation is individual-specific.

Weak and not Interested in Bangla Subject

In English Version institutions, as the mode of communication and instruction is English, students are not interested to learn Bangla. Most of the students said, "Bangla classes are not so impressive as other classes". Moreover, Afifa, Rebeca, Rubel, Tamim asserts that from the very beginning of their student life, they did not give emphasis on Bangla as a compulsory subject and showed reluctance to study Bangla. For this, they always obtain poor marks in Bangla and find it difficult to learn Bangla despite Bangla as their mother tongue (Nur, 2021). So it is proved that English Version students face challenges to study Bangla and as a result, they don't feel interest in Bangla and in most cases they become reluctant to learn Bangla as a subject.

Use of Bangla Version Textbooks for Better Understanding

Based on the participants' feedback, it can be concluded that the English proficiency level of Bangladeshi students is very poor. The proficiency of English language in Bangla medium schools in Bangladesh is low due to the socio-economic status of the sector. English medium schools, on the other hand, are only accessible to the privileged classes (Hamid & Erling, 2014). Afifa states that when faced with vocabulary shortages, she employs several

strategies to overcome the difficulties. She sometimes looks up unfamiliar terms in the dictionary and other times seeks assistance from her instructor.

Nevertheless, when the researcher inquires about the use of Bangla textbooks to enhance their comprehension of the subject matter. Tamim, Rokhsana, and Tanjim acknowledge that they use Bangla textbooks when necessary. However, the decision is contingent upon the students' and instructors' level of competence. Furthermore, it is important for professors to assist learners in overcoming their apprehension towards comprehending English-language classes right from the outset of their academic journey.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research primarily examines the difficulties encountered by instructors and students in the English Version Sections of Bengali medium schools, where children are taught using English as the medium of instruction, following the National Curriculum of Bangladesh. The researcher discloses that learners studying in the English Version have deficiencies and are deficient in Bangla owing to their unwillingness and lack of enthusiasm in this topic. In addition, their proficiency in English language is lacking and they do not prioritize the importance of writing sentences accurately.

Nowadays English is widely acknowledged for the development of a country as the vast majority of scientific studies, inventions, national and international interactions, business relations and corporate meetings are in the English language. So, the researcher strongly recommends the implementation of English Version Sections to contribute to students' academic achievement.

In conclusion, this paper found the dual challenges faced by students in English Version sections—insufficient proficiency in both Bangla and English. Despite the aim to enhance bilingual competence among learners, the current approach may fall short in achieving balanced language mastery. To address these issues, a more integrated and supportive learning environment is needed, where both languages are given equal emphasis and students are encouraged to value their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Recommendations:

1. **Enhanced Teacher Training:** To provide targeted professional development for teachers to better equip them with the skills needed to teach both Bangla and English effectively.
2. **Regular Assessments:** To implement regular assessments to monitor students' progress in both languages, allowing for timely interventions to address any deficiencies and to support students' holistic language development. These steps will not only enhance language proficiency but also ensure that students in English Version sections are well-prepared to meet the demands of the modern, globalized world.
3. **Learners' Motivation:** To encourage the learners to be motivated in comprehending a foreign language so that they can be able to understand and use it properly and effectively. Because motivation plays a vital role in the teaching and learning environment.

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