

# **English Teaching and Learning in Rural Government Primary Schools and Non-Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh**

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English & Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English & Humanities

BRAC University

January, 2024

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## Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. My thesis, which I turned in to finish my degree at Brac University, is entirely original work of mine.
2. The thesis does not contain any previously published or third-party written material, except properly cited through complete and correct referencing.
3. The thesis doesn't include any content that has been approved or submitted for consideration toward any other degree or certification from a college, university or other organization.
4. All main sources from which I took help from have been acknowledged.

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## Approval

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## **Ethics Statement**

For ethical reasons, it was made sure that the participants of the research were not subjected to harm in any way whatsoever and respect for their dignity was prioritized. Full consent was obtained orally from the teachers before the interviews were taken and the aim of the research was explained to them. As understanding about the research was difficult for the students, permission to interview them was taken from their teacher. The privacy and confidentiality of all the participants were ensured in this research. Either Pseudonyms or code names were used for participants and names of the institutions were not mentioned to ensure participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Also, questions that may make participants uncomfortable were avoided to the best of the interviewer's capability. Misleading information was avoided, and data findings and analysis were shown in an unbiased manner in this study.

### **Abstract**

Primary-level education is very important as it builds the base of the students' future. Learning English as a second language from an early age is very important in the context of Bangladesh. In this country, Children usually start learning English in either kindergarten or primary school. Curriculum guidelines provided by NCTB are often not reflected properly in primary school classrooms due to many limitations. This study aims to find out the real-life situation of English language teaching and learning in sub-district and union level government primary schools and non-government primary schools to understand how English language is taught and learned in the rural primary schools of Bangladesh. The participants of this study are students and teachers. This study follows qualitative research methods. This study analyzed the data collected from the teachers, students, and observations of English classes. The analysis of the collected data also shows a picture of the learners' performance in the secondary language, the challenges they face, and their view of learning English. At the end of the study, this paper suggests some areas needed to improve in the teaching, materials used in the classroom, physical facilities, etc.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Teaching, group work, speaking and listening skills, quality teacher.

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**List of Acronyms**

MoE	Ministry of Education
NCTB	National Curriculum Textbook Board
GTM	Grammar-Translation Method
CLT	Communicative language teaching
TBLT	Task-based language teaching



## **Introduction**

The purpose of a primary school's education is to make sure that its students are developed comprehensively while learning playfully. The education students get in primary school must ensure that all students develop cognitive, social, cultural, and physical skills, and develop emotionally in the best possible way to prepare for future school years and higher studies. Primary level education is mandatory to develop a skilled nation. Even though basic-level English is taught in primary schools following the curriculum, it is as much as, if not more important than other subjects. English is widely acknowledged as the world's lingua franca. Being proficient in English is one of the keys to gaining access to most higher-level educational institutions, business sectors, and technology. 150 plus public and private universities in Bangladesh use English as a medium of instruction (Naik, 2018).

## **Background**

During the British colonial era, English was introduced as a foreign language to the Indian subcontinent. During the colonial era, the English language gradually emerged as a crucial communication and business tool. It quickly got to a certain point where it was needed to meet the demands of modernity, enlightenment, political identity, job opportunities, and educational, scientific and technological growth (Rahman et al., 2019). After independence, India and united Pakistan still gave importance to learning the English language. Bangladesh, after independence, decided to decrease the use of English but soon realized that it was detrimental. In the late 1990s, the Ministry of

Education (MoE) of Bangladesh added Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the primary and secondary school curriculum to improve English language teaching. As the Ministry of Education (MoE) chose to adopt CLT methods, the National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB) curriculum explicitly emphasizes the development of learners' communicative ability when using English language. Before introducing CLT, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was followed to teach English in schools (Kabir, 2015). Now, the syllabus, curriculum, and textbooks have been designed to follow the CLT principles in Bangladesh.

### **Primary Level English Curriculum**

The goals the primary level English curriculum has are for the students to understand basic commands or instructions, prepare students to be capable of communicating in English and ready to be engaging in day-to-day conversation. Also, for the students to be able to read fluently and interpret various texts suitable to the students' level and be able to write in English, to describe people, things around them, scenes and situations, and to convey what they need and their feelings. So, to summarize, the objective is making sure the students develop 4 communicative skills, which are listening, reading, speaking and writing.

Some changes have been made to the new primary level English curriculum which are appropriate for the age. Teaching-learning activities are planned considering the global context. It has included some basic routine expressions and planned activities like student-student and student-teacher activities for the students to learn social interaction. Some topics with authentic texts like announcements, directions with or without signs or symbols, warnings and suggestions about medical conditions, etc. have been added to

help students address possible needs in actual circumstances. The curriculum has given importance on improving speaking and listening abilities as a basis for improving writing and reading abilities. The curriculum suggests using audio and video materials which would interest the students and help them develop listening and speaking skills. Audio and video materials are especially good for improving students' pronunciation as they get accustomed to ideal pronunciations while listening to these. There are some contents which help improve pronunciation, stress, and intonation all together. The *English For Today* textbooks were written aiming to assist the learners in achieving proficiency in all four English language skills via relevant and fun exercises. Topics and Themes in the textbook have been chosen in such a way that they will not only assist students in addressing their communicative needs in actual circumstances but will also instill humane ideals in the students and widen their mental horizons. (Kabir, 2015)

A detailed teacher's guide has been provided by NCTB which has English sound symbols for the teachers to follow. These symbols also come with samples and explanations. A sample classroom language has also been given in the guide. It has detailed explanations and suggestions about how the teachers will evaluate the students. It shows how formative assessment takes place. The guide puts emphasis on using digital tools to make use of several digital elements which are made according to Communicative Language Teaching techniques. These digital elements along with the book *English for Today* will help with students' faster learning and teachers' ease of teaching.

## **Context of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is a South Asian nation with an area of 148,460 square kilometers. It is the world's tenth most populated country, with a population of over 169 million people. Bangladesh is one of the world's most overpopulated nations. Its borders are connected with Myanmar and India. The country's population is Muslim majority. Its economy is mostly reliant on agriculture.

Rural regions or villages in Bangladesh have a faster population growth and a lower literacy rate than cities. People's livelihood in the villages revolves around agriculture. They live in a friendly, simple, and easy environment. Their houses are often built with straw, bamboo, tin sheets, and mud. The majority of rural residents are farmers. They labor in their fields and earn a living by cultivating their land. Many villagers do not have land of their own and work on the property of others. Children in the village help their families with labor during harvest and crop plantation besides studying and playing many types of regional games and popular sports like cricket and football in the fields, open areas or in their own school playgrounds.

One of the world's biggest primary education systems can be seen in Bangladesh, where approximately sixteen million children enrolled in various primary schools (ages between the ages of six and ten years). There are three hundred sixty-five thousand nine hundred twenty-five primary school teachers working in over eighty-two thousand two hundred eighteen schools. These schools include 10 distinct categories of schools, including Madrasahs (Kabir, 2015). Most villages have at least one school near them.

Primary education consists of 5 years of formal education. All children get free schooling up to the secondary level (Class 6-10). Both primary and secondary school students receive free textbooks. In 2017, around 360,000,000 free textbooks were distributed to 40,000,000 primary and high school students (Amin, 2017). In Bangladesh, formal teaching of the English language starts at the Primary level in public schools. Children learn a new language very fast when they are still young. That's why both English teaching and learning has to be given priority at the primary level in the context of Bangladesh where learning English is a must for higher education and better employment.

There is a difference in primary education between primary schools in cities and villages, mainly in terms of the quality of English teaching. Also, a difference can be seen in terms of management, possession of teaching equipment, and other facilities between these two types of schools. There is an increasing number of private schools in the urban areas. Urban wealthy families can afford to put the children in their family into a costly private primary school. These private schools can afford to have well qualified teachers who demand a good salary and other costly facilities often. Teachers in rural primary schools are often neglected in terms of salary and other facilities. These teachers very often have problems with getting access to modern teaching materials and equipment like computers, multimedia projectors, etc. Sometimes they do not get access to the internet and electricity. So, many qualified teachers tend to move to urban area schools where there is more prospect for better earnings and getting facilities (Amin, 2017). So, getting better and more qualified teachers is also a challenge in rural areas. As primary school teachers get a minimal salary, they often depend on private tuition to meet their

ends. Teachers get private tuition in cities more easily as many city dwellers have the means to provide their kids with private tuition. In rural areas, many families struggle to provide their children with even the basic necessities for education. Very few families can spare enough money to provide their kids with private tuition.

## Literature Review

The education system in Bangladesh has seen significant changes in recent decades, especially in the primary-level education section. In a research paper, Rahman (2019) talks about Issues, outcomes, and implications of English language teaching in Bangladesh in recent times. He describes various barriers teachers face in teaching English, the country's given status to English; English education policy; variables influencing the adoption of communicative language teaching curriculum, methods, and materials, the existing assessment's validity and its impact on secondary language education in Bangladesh; and the present state of the teachers' growth as professionals. He also talks about the historical background of English teaching in his paper.

Among the objectives of primary-level education, the main objective is to ensure a comprehensive progress for the students. Prodhan (2016) studied the education system in Bangladesh in his paper. He states the importance of every level of education. He says, "The precondition for building a strong progressive country is a properly educated populace and every level of education". He also studied the curriculum of primary education in Bangladesh. He shows a problem that at the primary level, 13 different types of curriculums are being followed, which makes students enter higher-level education institutions with different levels of standards.

Amin (2017) in his paper, shows a comprehensive picture of secondary language teaching in Bangladesh. Importance of communicative English, assessment system and the ways it influences education, teachers' training, what teachers believe about effective

teaching quality, how they practice teaching, and the barrier they face is discussed in his paper. He also talks about the disparity of available resources and opportunities in urban and rural schools.

Kabir (2015) researched the coherence between curriculum instructions and classroom teaching and assessment methods. He talks about the curriculum and its design process. He also briefly talks about communicative English teaching. In his paper, Kabir shows How much Bangladeshi teachers can implement our curriculum and the gap between English curriculum instructions for teaching English and its implementation at the primary level.

Jahan et al. (2017) in their paper, show the situation of primary education and the government's concern regarding it. It speaks about the challenges primary education is facing like having a lack of coordination among primary educational institutions and diversity in primary education planning. Also, there is a lack of teachers who are qualified and well-trained. There is a concerning gap between the teacher-student ratio at the primary level. They suggest more budget allocation to reduce these challenges and the betterment of the quality of primary education.

In Bangladesh, many of the English teachers still try to follow the GTM techniques which is the long-established practice of teaching English and many teachers are well accustomed to GTM techniques. Shrestha (2013) in her paper, explains the findings of her interview with primary school students regarding learning English. It says although the students loved reciting and exercises, they thought that communicative language learning activities like role-playing and dialogue were more helpful and fun than translation and memorization for learning English. The teachers frequently blended



Traditional and communicative teaching methods in English classes of these students. According to the paper, any significant language development initiative must take into account the local context and learners' perspectives on language acquisition for more effective learning.

Milon (2016) studied rural primary school students' English learning situations. In his study, around half of the students said they can not study English or practice speaking in English on a regular basis mostly because English appeared very hard to them and they lack the environment. Most of the students learn and practice the English language through going to coaching, private tuition, and reading guidebooks. Their schoolteacher's classes in the schools have been said to be of little help and The English teachers rarely do any speaking, writing or reading exercises in the classroom. No primary school teacher does listening practice in the classroom.

As students are facing problems when learning and viewing learning English as a very hard task, proper teaching techniques and methods can change this scenario. Siddik (et al., 2020) In their study, pointed out English teachers' training needs to implement inclusive education. Inclusive education means providing the same kind of learning opportunities to students of all sectors (both rural and urban). Their study suggests that the in-service training the primary school teachers get needs to be upgraded, which will provide the teachers with skills in collaborating with stakeholders in school communities and teaching strategies for different children.

Nunan (2003) in his book, *Task-Based Language Teaching*, talks about the theory and various practices of task-based language teaching. He also provides a range of tasks with examples for teachers who wish to incorporate task-based language teaching (TBLT)

in their teaching techniques. He illustrates how teachers can design activities themselves which would promote and facilitate language learning in authentic contexts in the classrooms.

Jeremy Harmer (2007) in his book, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, navigates through very essential features of teaching English. He provides his insights into lesson planning, classroom management, and four language skills development with a lot of illustrative pictures and examples to make complex concepts more accessible and understandable. I particularly liked his classroom management techniques. He also describes the importance of creating an adaptive and student-centered classroom. He gives importance to communicative language teaching approaches in the classroom to make lessons more fun and engaging. He says that good teaching always facilitates understanding rather than just stating information or facts. He also describes critical areas of language teaching and teaching methodology focusing on practical techniques, strategies, and tips for training skillful English teachers. He also offers a variety of prospects for language teaching and learning activities. He wrote his book with beginner teachers and more seasoned teachers in mind. The seasoned teacher will receive an update on the most recent theoretical and practical methods for teaching languages. His writings and strategies are adaptable to various situations teachers of Bangladesh are facing.

### **Research gap**

Most of the research done regarding teaching English language in rural schools of Bangladesh is either problems or limitations in English teaching or the situation of secondary or higher-level institutions' English teaching. No recently conducted study was

found which talks about real-life English teaching in rural primary schools and how the recently introduced curriculum with a formative assessment system is faring in these schools. By doing this research and finding out the answers to my research questions, I tried to find out in-depth real-life situations of English teaching and learning in rural primary schools specifically.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

To raise the standard of education, the government has initiated multiple approaches throughout the years. The English curriculum was designed in a way that the textbooks would interest the students and their four communicative skills would develop Simultaneously. These four communicative skills are- listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills and writing skills. Since there are still many limitations in rural primary schools, some questions emerge regarding English language teaching and learning in primary schools in rural areas. The four research questions which guided my research are-

- a. What is the state of English language teaching in rural primary schools?
- b. How is the learning environment in the schools?
- c. What type of teaching techniques and methods are used in the class and how effective are these?
- d. How do students respond to English teaching and how do they perform?

I prepared two semi-structured interview question sets, one for the teachers and one for the students. Some questions were made on the spot according to the situation. These sets of questions helped me with sufficient data which helped me in finding the answers to my research questions. The questions were mostly open-ended questions. The question set for the teachers were questions regarding their educational backgrounds, teaching methods, teaching techniques, their experience, idea and thought

about the curriculum, thought about their students and English teaching, providing feedback to the students, assessments, use of teaching aids and other books, if they have received any training on the current primary school curriculum. For the students, the questions were also open-ended. The questions were about what they previously learned and how they use those, their thoughts about communicative skills, their thoughts about their English teacher, the books they read, what type of feedback they get from their teacher, use of teaching aids, tests, class works and books. Some questions were there to find out their proficiency level of speaking and listening skills and performance.

There were also some follow-up questions made on the spot in the interviews for better understanding of the answers and to get additional data.

### **Research Design**

I went through many research articles and journals related to primary and secondary school education, English curriculum for the primary level, English teaching, teaching techniques, and methods to get, and understanding about the issue and make a hypothesis. Then I designed my research following the qualitative research method as I thought this method would be the best for this study. Visiting the site and talking with the participants is a suitable way to learn more about the practices, teaching techniques, views, beliefs, implementation of the English curriculum, students' performance, preferences, and state of English Language teaching and learning in the primary schools. The data collection and analysis methods of this research follow the qualitative method. This research falls under a case study because it analyzes a single topic intensively, like teaching and learning in rural government primary schools and rural non-government primary schools in Bangladesh context, and shows the reality.

## **Participants**

There were a total of sixteen participants in this research. Five of them were teachers and the rest were students. To keep them anonymous and for ease of explaining, we will call the teachers Teacher-A, Teacher-B, Teacher-C, Teacher-D, and Teacher-E. Teacher-A is a government primary school teacher of a sub-district level primary school. He has 7 years of teaching experience. He takes classes of class 5 and 4 students. Teacher-B is a government primary school teacher and also the headmaster of the school. The school is a union level primary school. He took English classes of class 5 students. He had 17 years of teaching experience. Teacher-C is also a government primary school teacher of that union level school. She takes English classes of class 4. She has teaching experience of around 6 years. Teacher-D is a non-government school teacher of a union level private primary school and takes English classes of class 3 and 4. Teacher-E is the headmaster of the private school and he takes English classes of class 5.

In this study, the students who participated in the interviews were between 9-12 years old. 8 students were from government primary schools and 3 students were from private schools. Some of the students were in class 4 and some were in class 5. All of the teachers joined in one on one interview sessions and provided me with descriptive answers based on their thoughts and experiences. I verbally explained the aim of the research before talking about the interview to them. Some of the students joined in one on one interview sessions but some were in groups when I asked them questions.

## **Data Collection**

I visited the sub-district level government primary school first and then the union level government primary school. The non-government primary school was visited last. The school names are not mentioned for ethical reasons. After reaching the sites, I took permission from the authority of each school to observe English classes and take interviews from the English teachers regarding my research. I waited for a while before the office assistant took me to the class-five's room to observe the English class in the private primary school. As for the Government primary schools, I found out the room and class time after asking one of the teachers in the teachers' meeting room. I observed class 5's English session at the sub-district level and class 4 and 5's English class at the union level primary school. As I observed the classes, I took notes. I also took notes as I checked some of the students' *English for today* books and their note books. After observing the classes, I asked the teachers for interviews, and they agreed to participate. Three of them agreed to be audio recorded but the other two were not comfortable being audio recorded, so, I took notes to record their interview. Bangla was used as a medium to conduct the interviews. I interviewed the students after I interviewed the teachers in each school. Some parts of the interview were audio recorded, but as some of them were very uncomfortable being recorded and looking at the recording device, they were not answering properly. Some parts of the interviews were noted down after the interview ended. The interviews were taken using their native language (Bangla), but some questions were asked to the students in English to get an idea about their listening skills.

## **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the interviews was mostly in Bangla language. I began storing and possessing the data in my mind simultaneously with collecting the data. However, after the interviews, I translated and transcribed the data first. Then I went through the data again to find out connections to sort them. Then used codes to label them and omitted redundancy. I found several themes in the recorded answers. I put the coded data according to themes for better understanding and summarizing. Then I thoroughly analyzed the data and used it in the research report.



## Results

The results are composed of the data analyzed from English language class observations, interviewing the teachers and students.

### Class Observation

**School visit 1:** The first class I observed was class five's English session of the sub-district level government primary school. The school was two storied and had a playing ground in front of it. The classroom that I visited had space for at least 50 students. There were 39 students present in the class. There were 47 in that class overall. There was no electric light in the classroom, but it was sufficiently lit as it had large windows and open spaces outside the classroom. There were no educational posters other than some faded pictures and drawings. The classroom materials were textbooks and a blackboard. The teacher (teacher-A) came into the class on time. After greetings, he told the students to take their 'English for Today' book and open page 38. The teacher was giving most of the instructions in Bangla language. Even the page number he said was in Bangla. Most of the students brought their books and shared books with those who did not. The teacher read aloud "Unit 10, my home district" and asked a student from the front bench to start reading. As the student finished reading a para, the teacher began asking the students word meanings like "district, municipality, flow". But without sufficient wait time, he answered the questions and explained them in detail. The rest of the lesson went the same way, and the teacher was giving the reading task to students at random. The teacher was translating some of the sentences the first time it was read. The passage

was read 3-4 times. After the reading aloud task was over, the teacher began to write the questions from task B of the practice section. It was pair work, but the teacher did not divide them into pairs and asked them to complete the task. After some of the students finished the task, he gave them feedback. Then he wrote ideal answers to the questions on the board, and the rest of the students who did not show their writing to the teacher, wrote the answers down in their notebook. Task C, a group work, was disregarded and the teacher directly moved to task D and explained the instructions to the learners. The questions in the task were about the students' own home district. Then he told the students to write a short essay about their home district while keeping the answers to the questions of task D in the essay as homework and bring it to the next class which was written in task E. Then the teacher began teaching unit 14 of the lesson 1, it was a listen and read task like the previous unit. Task F and G of unit 11 were also not studied. The class time ended in the middle of students reading aloud and the teacher told the class that they would study the unit in the next class. The teacher could not give attention to all of the students equally. Students lost interest towards the end of the class. The teacher did not have a formative assessment diary which he was supposed to have for assessing the students. Later I found out that as it was almost the end of the year, they already finished their syllabus and they were practicing important lessons. The teacher was waiting for his training next year for applying the new curriculum instructions in his class; he was yet to receive any formal training on the new curriculum.

**School visit 2:** I observed class 4 and class 5's English classes in the union level primary school. The school was smaller compared to the sub-district level school but had more space around it. First I visited class 4. The teacher (teacher C) was already in the

room and the class had just started. The classroom was well-lit. 23 out of 26 students were present in the class. The teacher was reading from unit-34, a paragraph about SM Sultan. The students were repeating after the teacher. The reading was done word by word and sometimes in common sentences. After reading the passage one time, the teacher repeated again but this time there were whole sentences most of the time. She instructed the students in English but the students did not seem to understand some instructions at first, then she repeated the instructions in Bangla. She gave the students reading task one by one. The first two students read the whole paragraph but the rest read 1 para or a couple of sentences. Some students could read fluently but some students could not. All of the students participated. Then she gave the students a class work- making present form of verbs from the verbs used in the paragraph. Some students participated in writing the words on the board. The students were less attentive during the class but the teacher was roaming around and helping and correcting them. Most of the students understood the task and could do it. The teacher gave feedback by writing "very fine, excellent". At that time 2 construction workers came into the classroom to collect some construction materials kept at the rear of the classroom and disrupted the on-going class. Construction works of some rooms in the school were being done during school hours. After the task was done, the teacher gave task B and C from the book. Most of the students completed the task. After the task was finished, Teacher checked all of their notebooks and gave feedback. Some of the weak students were noticed by the teacher more. The last class work was answering wh-questions that the teacher wrote on the blackboard. The students were confused when answering the questions. This task

required finding the answers from the book. Task D, E and F were left undone in the class. The teacher gave them a task- 'wh-questions making' from sentences for Homework.

Many of the students had pronunciation problems. They had pronunciations written next to words in Bangla in their textbook. The students seemed competitive and eager to participate in the classworks. Some students had lost their attention and interest at the later part of the class. The room had colorful drawings on the walls. There were educational posters kept in the teachers' meeting room but the dust on them says they are not used often.

The next class I visited was class 5's English class at that school. There were less students in that class. There were a total of 15 students and 13 of them were present. After entering the class, I found out that It was not a conventional class but a practice session for an upcoming exam. I found students were writing something from books which did not look like textbooks. The students were practicing reading and writing comprehension from *Panjeree Guide* books. After asking, I found out that they were preparing for an exam which was taken combining 25 primary schools under the sub-district education office. There was not much to observe in the class. The teacher (Teacher B) had given them the task to complete sample exam questions from the guidebook and left the room for some time. Students were completing the task attentively. They had already finished their syllabus and revised it one time. Now they are taking preparation for the exam. Even though the PSC exam was not there, the students still went through an inter-school exam. However, they stated that they were less serious and less pressured about the exam.

**School visit 3:** I visited a rural private primary school and observed the taking of class 5's English class. The classroom of the private primary school was small, with a maximum capacity of around 30 students. The classroom was well-lit with the help of electric light and daylight from a window. It had several educational posters and drawings, including a world map and a Bangladesh map. There were 18 students in the class and 3 students were absent. The classroom materials included a blackboard and textbooks. I was later told that extra classes were taken in another room with a big LED screen where the students learned English with Audio-video materials. The school had internet access. The students would watch previously selected educational videos on YouTube under the supervision of a teacher. I asked if the students watched audio and video materials (CDs/DVDs) mentioned in the curriculum, but the students did not.

The teacher (teacher D) came into the class and greeted the students. He then collected homework sheets from the students. The students were given fill-in-the-blanks and word matching tasks in a sheet as Homework. He opened the 'English for Today' book and asked the students to open page 90, unit 23. Task A showed some pictures of natural disasters. He asked students if they could recognize the disasters. The students talked among themselves for some time. Then she described the pictures. The teacher was speaking mostly in Bangla, but he mixed some English words in his speech. Task C showed a dialogue between two friends and a fire service officer. The teacher first read the dialogue aloud. He was translating some of the parts of the dialogue as he read. After the dialogue reading was over, he asked three students to read the dialogue taking one role each. Other students were asked to observe and listen carefully. He was roaming

around the class to observe the students. After the first 3 students finished reading, 9 other students were given the task to play the roles from the dialogue and read aloud. After the reading, he asked the students questions from task D. They answered aloud together. Then the teacher showed the students the right answer from the book and answered task D in their notebook. After this, he asked the question in task E - "Students, have you ever encountered a natural disaster?". The students talked among themselves, some students answered they saw storms and floods. The teacher asked the students to complete task H in their notebooks. The students were swiftly done. The teacher gave them feedback after looking at their notebooks. He both verbally complimented them and wrote words like "very good, excellent" in the notebook of the students who answered as expected. Those who answered wrong were corrected and "have to try harder, have to be more attentive" was said to them. Then the Teacher gave some sheets to the students which had some tasks for their Homework. They were also told to complete the task I in their home. The end of the class was near. As this was the first period, the teacher called the students' attendance and gave them feedback on their previous day's homework. Then he reminded the students about their homework and ended the class.

The teacher and students were active during the class. But towards the end of that class, some of the students had lost their interest. The class duration was about 1 hour. The teacher used many English words when talking and gave most of the instructions in English, the students also seemed to understand most of the instructions. The teacher was saying some sentences in English and translating them immediately.

## Interview Findings

**Interview With the Teachers:** From the multiple open-ended and some suggestive questions I asked during the interviews, the first thing I found out that all of the teachers had in common is that none of the teachers had English as their education background. Teacher-B and teacher-E were fluent in speaking English and they were the only teachers who seemed to have sufficient knowledge about the current English curriculum of primary school. Teacher-B was the only teacher who got any training for teaching according to the new curriculum. He said that he had undergone training according to the new curriculum a few days ago, and the training was still ongoing at that time. The school hopes to apply the new curriculum in the new educational year when the training is over for the teachers. Teacher-B described their training given according to the curriculum- "teaching methods are similar to the previous curriculum's teaching method, but the textbooks are changing.". He emphasized the evaluation of the students. The training according to the new curriculum was teaching them how they would assess the students. Formative assessment has been added to the evaluation process recently. Before, collective assessment at the end of the year was given the most importance. Now, formative assessments are being prioritized more. Formative assessment is helping in getting rid of the fear of learning or fear of teachers, creating an enjoyable environment for children and at the same time making the students more spontaneous. Formative assessment is assessing students during lessons or at the later part of the lessons continuously. The teachers would use 2 diaries for keeping track of students for this assessment. In the Teacher's diary-1, every lesson, unit, or session's assessment score

is recorded. Assessment scores are of three types, fully successful is 2, partially successful is 1, and unsuccessful is 0. All of the lessons' results are combined at the end to give a progressive report. The progressive report contains feedback like "very good, good, etc.". Before the students were given a number centered result sheet but now the picture is different. Teacher-B seemed hopeful about the new curriculum and its assessment system. Teacher-E also said the curriculum to be suitable for the age. But he has a different opinion on not having the previous examination system. He said, the students generally do not study much even with examinations, but it would be very hard for the teachers to get them to learn anything. He said "Yes, students' pressure would lessen and some students would learn better but weak students would get behind others." As students from rural areas come from marginal families, where they do not get the proper learning environment, school is their only place to learn English. But with exams gone, their seriousness to their lesson and class has lessened considerably. Teacher-A also has the same opinion as teacher-E. He also said that he's not totally satisfied with the curriculum as it suggests things that are not feasible in rural school contexts. The schools did not have sufficient manpower, teaching aids, or trained or skilled teachers to apply the current curriculum. Teacher-C and teacher-E did not have much opinion on the curriculum, but said they try to follow the curriculum.

As the book *English for Today* is written following the CLT methodology, the class activities also resemble CLT techniques. All of the teachers said they follow the book instructions and make the students do pair work and group work except for teacher-A. He said he sometimes gives students pairwork and role-play tasks but assigning group work to a room full of students is a very challenging task. There are risks of students only side-



taking and depending on others' work in a group task. The teacher often cannot observe the whole class and the situation may get chaotic. Also, group tasks take a lot of time to form groups but generally teachers do not have much time.

The teachers were satisfied with the English textbook. They said it was very interesting and enjoyable for the students. Teacher-D said she would also enjoy the book as she taught the students. But Teacher-B and Teacher-C showed different opinions. They said that it was hard for them to teach the students English by not having a grammar book. The current textbook suggests teaching the students grammar informally and teaching them grammar as they go through the lesson. But it was hard for teacher-B and teacher-C. They said the absence of the grammar book is not helping. Without teaching the students specific grammar items, the students can not absorb what they are taught properly and often forget. The students also face problems when studying by themselves. Teacher-B said that, if the textbook had more sentence structures, students could make more new sentences on their own.

The teachers said that they follow the instructions of the textbook when teaching. They make the students do the classroom activities and the students enjoy doing them. The activities reinforce the attention of the learners. The students interact with each other via class works and other tasks given by the teacher and practice speaking and listening. However, teacher-B said that the students' speaking and listening skills are lacking and to develop speaking skills and listening skills, the teachers have to use the classroom language (instructions and basic sentences in English used in the classroom) and communicate with the students more. The teachers are lacking in this aspect. Teachers are often not well prepared to communicate in English. He said that not getting the

expected feedback from the students often discourages teachers from trying to communicate with the students in English more.

The teachers said that the main limitation they face when teaching in a rural school is that most of the learners come from villages around the school and they do not have a proper learning environment at home. Teacher-E said that because most of the parents do not know how to provide a safe and comfortable environment for their children to learn. Some of the students do not complete their homework or study outside of their school at all. As many of the parents are uneducated and do not know proper parenting skills, students can not practice basic communication skills and sentences they learned at school when they return home. Teacher-D said the students talk to their teachers and peers in English but often feel shy when communicating with their parents or relatives at home. Teacher-E said they are trying to overcome this limitation by having teacher-parent meetings. Teacher-B said the students they get in their school have very different levels of background knowledge. Not every student can engage themselves like other students. Some students come from very poor families. Helping these students reach a satisfactory level is very difficult for him. And many of the students are irregular. They lack a studying environment at home and do not complete their homework. Teaching them a foreign language is hard. He said that some students were absent that day because they were helping their families with potato seed plantation or working as a child laborer for 200-500 taka per day in the fields. As it was the potato planting season at that time, the demand for laborers was high. Teacher-D said that the limitations she faced are lack of government initiatives to train kindergarten school teachers. These teachers are expected to follow the national curriculum but they are not given any training. Teacher A said they

lack the necessary teaching aids to follow the curriculum properly. They also lack teachers and the student-teacher ratio is quite high.

All of the teachers gave the students feedback and they emphasized the importance of it. Teacher-D and teacher-E said they never say or give any feedback which may demotivate the children.

Regarding the students' four skills, different schools behave differently. Teacher-A said that the students' listening skills and speaking skills, especially the speaking part, are not well developed. The teachers have the responsibility to help the students develop all four of their skills but as the students do not have the right environment and lack of practice, their speaking skills are not very good. "They need a lot of practice but we are not able to ensure it for all of the students". Teacher-B said he was engaging the students in communicative activities, group works, and pairworks to develop their speaking skills at the start of the year. But as the combined exam is at the door, they are focusing on the reading and writing part now. Teacher C said they do focus on students all four skills and they are trying to the best of their ability to develop them. Teacher-D and teacher-E said they have communicative activities that help students to develop their speaking skills on their own. When talking to the teacher, they are encouraged to speak in English. The teachers speak in English first and then translate it to the students. The students have decent speaking skills in their school. They are trying their best despite the limitations.

Every teacher has their own techniques to teach. Teacher-D and teacher-E said they use colorful books with pictures other than the textbook for class 1-2 students to teach them numbers and letters. They also use posters and toys. They teach these little students through playing and singing so that the students do not understand they are

being taught something but they keep learning. They use audio and video materials to enhance their speaking and listening skills. Every day, students learn and practice a number of new sentences to use in day to day conversation. They also learn new words and practice them. Teacher-D and teacher-E take weekly exams to help the students focus more on their studies. They learn greetings and salam in English. Teacher-B and Teacher C give importance and take special care to students' handwriting.

**Interview With the Students:** I asked the students about their favorite subject. Only one student from the private school said that his favorite subject was English. All students said that they liked learning English. They said that they enjoyed their English textbook. Three students found English to be a hard subject. To find out about their speaking and listening skills I asked them some questions in English. However, most of them could not properly understand the questions. I asked them to tell me about themselves. Only one of the government primary school students could describe themselves. Some of the private school students could describe themselves, but their speaking felt memorized. I also asked them to describe their family in English but none of them could say much. I asked them what they had learned in their English classes. They said they learned to write a letter, composition, fill in blanks, etc. I asked them if they could write a letter now if I told them to. only two of them confidently said they could. The students from the government primary schools said that they participate in group works but it is not very often. They like doing groupworks and speaking activities. They also like speaking to each other. They read guide books other than their textbook. The private school students said they often practice speaking activities in their classes. They also practiced listening activities as they watched the videos. None of the students use English

in day-to-day conversation and practice listening skills and speaking skills (listening English conversation, stories or poems and conversing in English) outside their classroom. The larger part of the students I interviewed said they liked their text-book and they did not hesitate to speak in English to their peers.

## Discussion

As I observed the English class in the sub-district level government primary school, I noticed that the teacher followed an old teaching method which was very close to the Grammar Translation Method(GTM). This method allows for more memorizing and less practicing of the language. He also disregarded the communicative group tasks as he thought that group work would make the class uncontrollable. Other teachers said they do make students engage in group works, and pair works, but looking at the class observation, these activities instructed in the textbook, especially the speaking activities are often disregarded. Teacher-C and Teacher-E also disregarded the tasks which had group works in their class. Teacher-B did not make the students read the textbook and instead, used a guidebook for writing and comprehension practice.

But this goes against the instructions of the curriculum and communicative English teaching. There was obvious room for group work or pair work in the class of Teacher-A. Teacher-C and teacher-E had fewer students in comparison, they had even more room for groupworks, observing and managing the students. As the previous examination system (even now it exists to a great extent) was a major driving force for the students' education and teachers' teaching in the class, the teachers are still very much comfortable with the old ways of teaching, where reading and writing are the only skills prioritized. In the conventional exams, students' reading comprehension and writing skills are evaluated. The students and their parents looked forward to their results in those exams. The teachers also modeled their teaching according to the exams and students were mostly driven to do better in the exams (Amin, 2017). As teachers did not have concrete

ways or sufficient guidelines or training to evaluate the students' listening skills and speaking skills before, the development of these skills is left out most of the time, even now. As formative assessment is being introduced, teachers now have the means to evaluate students' speaking and listening skills' progress. So, developing the students' all four skills now should be prioritized by the teachers. All of the instructions in the textbook must be followed to make it happen.

To assign the students with group works or pair works and still manage the class well, the teacher can use multiple sitting arrangements suitable for the tasks and observe the students closely as they engage themselves in communicative activities instructed in their textbook. The teacher can arrange groups and to manage the groups, he can assign group representatives. The seating arrangements suitable for a class with a lot of students for groupworks are multiple "O" shaped and multiple "U" shaped seating or separate table seating. Each group of students has to sit in a circle or horseshoe shape or in separate tables and seats, to do that, the chairs or benches have to be rearranged. For bolted chairs and benches, the teacher can take the students to an open area like the field to make the seating arrangement happen. This would help the teacher observe the students more closely and address the problems that may arise. For a classroom with fewer students, a single "O" or "U" shaped whole class seating can benefit the students a lot (Harmer, 2007). Observing group work and managing the class will need more practice and hard work for the teachers, but it's worth it as students will improve their communicative skills in a more enjoyable way. These group works are student-focused, and the teacher is only the facilitator.

The teaching method used in the classrooms was more on the teacher-centric side. Student-centric classes have a lot of benefits. They can make the students more engaging and promote personalized learning and critical thinking ability. Student-centric classes can help students remember what they learned more, and increase their motivation to learn and collaborate with peers. Also, students become more responsible for their education, they develop a sense of curiosity and love for learning, which prepare students for a lifelong journey of continuous education and adaptation to new information in the future (Yakubi et al.,2022).

Very little amount of class materials was used in the classes. The use of more class materials could shorten the first lesson time and teacher-A could manage to complete the following lesson, which he could not complete in the class. Also, this shows that the lesson was not well planned by the teacher. Teacher-C and teacher-E could have the time to make the students do the groupworks. Materials like flashcards and posters help students learn faster and pick their interests. Also, teachers would get more time to engage students in fun activities. The teacher-A did not give sufficient time for the students to answer the questions. Teacher-C and teacher-E gave more student wait time but it did not seem sufficient to me. Sufficient student wait time reinforces student participation and confidence. Teachers can not expect students to critically think if they do not give students much time to answer questions. The homework the teacher gave would only develop writing skills and neglect the other three skills.

In the private school's English class, Teacher-E was prepared for the class and brought teaching materials. He also taught the class fluently. He observed the students as they performed the tasks given to them and managed the class efficiently. But the



small number of students in the class helped him in that case. He used Bangla as a medium of instruction often when he could have also used English.

In the private school's English class, I noticed that the school instructs the teachers to follow the curriculum even though they do not seem to have any training in applying the curriculum. The private school teachers try to follow the textbook and curriculum instruction as they said, But it results in partial implementation of the curriculum. Not all of the CLT techniques are followed.

Teacher-A did not believe in implementing the curriculum in the rural context. The result of students or students' performance is not what is expected in the curriculum in the rural schools. According to the primary level curriculum, students of class 3 to 5 are supposed to speak and understand basic English but most of the students I interviewed properly do not know the basics. Some of them have better writing skills but all of them have gaps in listening and speaking skills. So, village children are lagging and getting behind other children. One of the reasons for this in my opinion is not having teachers with good qualities. The NCTB curriculum also emphasizes having teachers with better quality and language skills. It says "Teacher's Training with prior emphasis on developing Teacher's own language skills has been strongly suggested as what the teachers are expected to do in the classroom to involve and engage the students in communicative language activities is directly linked with the teachers' own competence in the language skills." (NCTB, 2023)

A teacher with good qualities can face the challenges thrown at him and still manage to teach the students properly. Having excellent verbal abilities, understanding teaching and learning, having subject matter knowledge, having a compassionate attitude

and being fair are prerequisites for being a quality teacher. Also, a quality teacher should show optimism toward teaching, encourage students' enthusiasm and motivate the students. A quality teacher establishes and maintains a favorable classroom environment which is safe and congenial for the students and increases the learning potential of the students. They also properly organize their lesson plan and implement them. Quality teachers often engage learners with a wide variety of books, raise intriguing and brain stimulating questions, give understandable instructions, and foster a supportive and pleasant classroom environment even in a low-income area like the rural areas in Bangladesh. A quality teacher is familiar with and has a good grasp of the curriculum's contents, goals, and purposes and employs various teaching tactics which are appropriate for the situation following the curriculum's instructions. (Amin, 2017).

So, through a quality teacher, the barriers of a rural school may get easy to break and offer children quality teaching. To get more quality teachers, more resources and planning are needed for training teachers. Also, school facilities need improving for better education. The schools need projectors, computers, and other devices for following the curriculum's instruction of showing selected audio and video materials which completes the teaching. Also, the rural government primary schools should arrange proper teacher-parent meetings which would inform the parents about their children's needs and what the parents are required to do to give their children a proper and safe learning environment at home.

## Conclusion

This study discussed the state of English teaching and learning in primary schools in rural areas. It also talked about the primary English curriculum and its effects on the English classes in the schools. This study shows that the village primary school students are lagging and getting behind other students. It mentions some of the reasons for the students lacking in speaking and listening skills and suggests practical solutions which may help the teachers and the students in facing these problems. Also, the primary school authorities and teachers need to take their duty as a teacher more seriously and the primary school teachers need to aim to become a quality teacher. The English language has significance in many ways in Bangladesh. English language competency is required to satisfy the worldwide demand for capable workers. However, in order to obtain improved English language skills, the base needs to be strong. So, to make the base of the population strong, much more planning, resources, and manpower is required.

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