

## A Critical Review of the Classroom Practices in the Primary Schools of Bangladesh

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### *Abstract*

*This literature based article is a critical review of the present classroom situations in both the urban and the rural primary schools of Bangladesh. Different videographs, personal observations and research findings along with some reports depicts that the classroom situation in the primary schools of Bangladesh is below standard. Teachers still follow the traditional ways of classroom practices because of lack of potential knowledge and classroom management skills, lack of motivation towards teaching and lack of professional satisfaction. All these eventually have some negative effects on the learning of the children. Thus, some suggestions have been proposed to ensure quality classroom practice in the primary schools of Bangladesh. However, in recent days, the situation is being changed with the collaborative efforts of the Government and some non-Government organisations which should be a matter of comfort for the future generations.*

*Keywords: Classroom Practice, Primary Classrooms, Bangladeshi Classrooms*

### INTRODUCTION

Classroom practice refers to all the activities of both the teacher and the students inside the classrooms. Teachers' behaviour towards the students, teacher-student interaction, teaching-learning methods and techniques employed by the teachers, all these are included in the classroom practice. Classroom practice is necessary for the students' well balanced development of knowledge and skills, which is very crucial for the primary students. Thus, in the primary schools, the classroom practices should be student-centric, consistent and well organised.

The area of this article has been selected as the classroom practice of the primary schools of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a third world country with a literacy rate of 53.7% [1]. To increase the literacy rate, primary education (Grade I –V) has been made compulsory [2]. There are at present 78,685 primary schools (10 different types) with 16,957,894 students and 3,95,281 teachers [3]. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education along with some directorates manages and administrates the whole primary education sector [4].

Quality primary education in Bangladesh is now a priority. To ensure quality primary education, quality classroom practice is essential. However, the classroom practice in most of the primary schools of Bangladesh is not

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satisfactory, which leads to the focus of this article. This article includes a critical analysis of the classroom practices of the primary schools of Bangladesh, including the general scenario, factors impacting this practice, what is being done to change it and what else can be done for it.

### **THE SCENARIO**

The present situation in most of the primary schools of Bangladesh is very poor. Visual data revealed that the classroom teaching-learning practices in most primary schools, especially in the rural ones, are not satisfactory [5] – [6] – [7]. Observation reports also depicted that primary classrooms are mainly teacher directed and lecture based. The use of demonstration, discussion and other interactive methods is minimal, though the situation varies depending on the quality of the school [8]. The reason behind this is that, though the Education for All objectives for Bangladesh was both increasing enrolment and promoting quality of education, the focus was mostly achieving enrolment targets rather than quality enhancement [9]. As a result, it has been found that the number of students per school has risen and the quality has actually declined [10].

### **FACTORS RESPONSIBLE**

Researchers have pointed out some issues behind this quality of classroom practice. Firstly, the teacher-student ratio is substantial. The average ratio is 1:40 [11] and in some cases it is as high as 1:60 [12]. 84.9% teachers in a study claimed that it is not possible to ensure quality education with this ratio [13]. Secondly, most primary schools are far from having adequate physical facilities with no or unhygienic toilet facilities and limited teaching materials which have a negative effect on the teachers' classroom performance [14]. Thirdly, it has also been noticed that most of the rural primary and urban Government primary teachers are under-qualified [15]. Again, qualified teachers are not satisfied with their salaries and other facilities given [16] – [17]. All these result in traditional classroom practices with no or less teacher-student interaction. However, noting the positive sides of the lecture method, it has been suggested that quality classroom practice might be used in Bangladesh as it is cost effective, less time consuming and suitable for large class sizes [18].

### **CHANGES in SITUATION**

Nevertheless, the situation is now changing. Different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in conjunction with the Government are working hard to make the primary classrooms interactive as well as interesting. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education is running various projects to train the teachers. The curriculum and the textbooks of primary level have now been changed. Textbooks are now more interesting and easy to understand. To match up with the textbooks, Bangladeshi classrooms are now receiving high-tech makeovers and thus breaking the traditional rule of monotonous classroom practices [19]. Some rural primary schools are being given free i-pads for every child so that the children can learn in a more constructive way. All these initiatives are

appreciable, but whether those will really improve the quality and classroom practice is a question.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above discussion, it can be said that to ensure quality, the issues that hamper classroom practice should be addressed. So firstly, in order to reduce the teacher-student ratio, more schools might be established and more teachers may be appointed. If more schools cannot be established, then existing schools may have more classes such as, two different shifts or more than one section for every grade. In this way, the number of students will not increase in one classroom and thus it will be easy to manage the classes. However, more teachers for the primary sector is a must, as there is already a lot of vacant posts in many schools [19]. In order to attract more young educated people to the teaching profession and to motivate the already in-service teachers, some initiatives can be used. Increasing the salary range and giving some additional benefits will encourage more people to join school teaching. Reinforcements, such as a teacher of the month award, may also add to teachers' enthusiasm in classroom practices.

Regarding the physical facilities of the schools, infrastructural development is needed in order to give the students a better learning environment. Well organised classrooms with an adequate number of sitting arrangements, a proper ventilation system and at least one black board are essential for the young students so that they can concentrate on their studies. All schools should have some basic teaching materials like blackboards, chalks, textbooks supplied by NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board), globes and maps. Besides, the schools should also have hygienic toilet facilities for the students. If not addressed, these issues can be detrimental to the overall classroom experience.

In terms of primary school teaching, there is a belief in the Bengali communities that it is very easy and anyone can do that, but the reality is the opposite. Teaching in primary schools needs a well developed understanding of children's learning process and great classroom management skills. Teachers' training is thus another important factor in ensuring quality classroom practice. Though pre-service training is required before starting the teaching job, most of the teachers do not actually receive the training. On the other hand, the majority of the trained teachers do not actually know about different teaching-learning strategies that can be implemented in the primary classrooms. So, the teachers need proper pre-service and in-service trainings. They should be trained not only about teaching strategies and classroom management skills, but also about creating proper learning environment for the students. For that reason, existing teachers' training manuals should be modified or new manuals should be developed by the education specialists.

Besides, a teacher's dedication is another important factor that impacts classroom teaching. Some teachers, who are highly qualified and have proper knowledge about all the teaching-learning strategies, are sometimes not dedicated enough towards their jobs. Regular monitoring might be useful to enhance their classroom performance. A head teacher's supervision is necessary to keep record of the teachers' classroom activities. It is also essential to create the sense of responsibility in the teachers.

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Moreover, there should be scope for mentoring. Experienced teachers can be the mentors of newly appointed teachers. Even the experienced teachers sometimes need support in developing interactive classroom teaching-learning activities. Every week there might be a time allocated for teachers' meeting where they can share their classroom experiences and develop teaching-learning skills. This interactive session among the teachers will help every teacher in preparing their lessons.

Basically, the classroom practice depends on the curriculum. Classroom teaching needs to be according to the objectives and learning outcomes. In Bangladesh, for grade I and II, there are only three subjects (Bengali, English and Mathematics) and the main objective of these two grades is to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of the children as well as to give them some basic mathematical knowledge. On the other hand, for grade III to V, there are six subjects (Bengali, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and Religion) and the main objectives for these grades are developing communicative skills, logical thinking and solving mathematical problems, gaining knowledge of scientific rules, methods and finding solutions in a scientific way, developing supportive mentality towards others, being socialised and gaining universal outlook, believing in Allah/God, and having morals and ethical values [20].

To achieve these objectives and learning outcomes, classroom teaching does not necessarily need a lot of teaching aids or high-tech facilities. In fact, it is very easy to make a primary classroom interactive and interesting. For example, in grade I and II, simple pair activities such as introducing each other to the whole class or group activities like continuing reading a story from where someone stopped, may help develop students' listening, reading and speaking skills. Mathematical skills can be developed by giving the children to count everyday objects that can be found within the classroom. Writing skills can be developed by giving them small paragraphs about themselves to write about their families or something they like most. This will not only develop their writing skills, but also will increase their creative thinking ability. Again, for grades III to V, some simple scientific experiments, for instance, trying to mix oil and water, how to find out if the egg is raw or boiled, what floats in water and what sinks, with explanation will increase children's interest in science. Communicative skills can be developed by activities such as writing a letter to a friend sitting next to you or describing your last holiday to the class. Including the students in making a budget for a class party or a trip may help students with mathematics. Group activities like cleaning the school playground or the classroom once a month might also be useful for the students' future social actions.

There is no absolute set method of classroom practice. The above mentioned activities are only some examples of how teachers can use different teaching-learning strategies in primary classrooms. There are a lot more different methods that can be incorporated. Teachers can come up with their own innovative ideas and incorporate those as well. The reason of giving the examples is to show that there are a number of ways to change the classroom practices without even using expensive teaching materials or modern technologies. Simple games and interactive methods can change the whole classroom situation. Incorporating

these creative ideas will break the monotony of traditional classroom practices as well as ensure active participation of the students in classroom, which will eventually lead to achieving the objectives and learning outcomes of the curriculum. On the other hand, these ideas are easy to employ and cost effective. Thus it will be very effective for a country like Bangladesh to use these ideas appropriately.

### CONCLUSION

In short, the present classroom practices in the primary schools of Bangladesh are below the mark, because of huge teacher-student ratio, inadequate teaching-learning materials, under-qualified teachers, lack of teachers' dedication and motivation, no mentoring facilities and lack of monitoring as well as supervision by the head teacher. To change the situation, the Government of Bangladesh has introduced different initiatives including teachers' training, education policy reforms, new curriculum development and providing modern technologies such as computers and projectors to the schools. All these changes have been welcomed by the schools as well as the teachers and the students. In addition to these changes, this essay has suggested some cost effective and easily applicable innovative ideas to incorporate in primary classrooms. While these suggestions may illuminate paths towards better classroom practices, there are some problems such as low salary range of the teachers, poor infrastructure and inadequate supplementary materials, which should be addressed as well. To draw a conclusion, it can be said that, Bangladesh needs a balance of all these existing ideas and suggestions. A proper combination of the use of interactive teaching-learning methods, increase of physical facilities and the use of technology can bring about the required progress in the classroom practice in the primary schools of Bangladesh.

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