

Factors Contributing to English Fluency Paucities among Secondary Level Students: Perspective Dinajpur Education Board, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors contributing to English fluency paucity among secondary-level students in the Dinajpur Education Board, Bangladesh. Despite the prominence of English as a global language, students in this region face significant challenges in achieving fluency. The research identified key factors such as inadequate teaching methods, lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, limited access to English learning materials, socio-economic barriers, and insufficient emphasis on speaking and listening skills in the curriculum. Data was collected through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, involving both students and teachers. The findings suggest that while students possess a basic understanding of English grammar and vocabulary, their ability to use the language in conversational settings remains limited. Furthermore, socio-cultural attitudes towards English and insufficient teacher training also play a role in hindering fluency development. The study recommends improvements in curriculum design, teacher professional development, and the promotion of interactive English language learning environments. Addressing these challenges could significantly enhance students' fluency and better prepare them for academic and professional opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

English fluency has become a critical skill in today's globalized world, playing a vital role in academic success, career opportunities, and social integration. In Bangladesh, English is recognized as a second language and is an essential subject within the national education system. However, despite its significance, many students at the secondary level continue to face challenges in acquiring the fluency necessary for effective communication. This issue is particularly evident in the Dinajpur Education Board, where fluency levels remain consistently below national standards.

The ability to speak English fluently extends beyond memorizing grammatical rules and vocabulary; it requires consistent practice, exposure, and interaction in real-life situations. Unfortunately, for many students in rural regions such as Dinajpur, opportunities for immersive English learning are limited. This creates a gap between the theoretical knowledge of the language and its practical application, resulting in poor fluency outcomes. Furthermore, various socio-economic and educational factors play a role in exacerbating these fluency deficiencies. These include the lack of trained teachers, insufficient teaching resources, and limited access to English language media. This study seeks to identify and evaluate these factors, offering insights into the specific challenges faced by students in the Dinajpur Education Board and proposing potential interventions to address these deficiencies.

Background of the Study

English holds a unique position in Bangladesh as both a second language and an essential tool for communication

in academic, professional, and international contexts. Its prominence in the education system is evident, with English being a compulsory subject from the primary level through to higher education. However, despite the national emphasis on English education, fluency in the language remains a significant challenge for many students, particularly at the secondary level.

The Dinajpur Education Board, one of the largest educational regions in northern Bangladesh, faces specific challenges in promoting English fluency among its students. Many students from this region come from rural and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, where exposure to English is often limited to the classroom setting. Furthermore, schools in this region frequently lack adequate resources such as language labs, modern teaching materials, and trained teachers proficient in English-speaking methodologies. Consequently, students often struggle with speaking and listening skills, which are critical components of fluency but are underemphasized in traditional teaching approaches.

Past studies on English language acquisition in Bangladesh have primarily focused on urban settings, leaving a gap in the understanding of rural students' challenges. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the specific factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies in the Dinajpur Education Board, shedding light on both educational and socio-cultural influences affecting language proficiency.

Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable significance as it addresses a critical gap in understanding the challenges faced by secondary level students in acquiring English fluency,

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particularly within the Dinajpur Education Board. While much research on English language proficiency in Bangladesh has concentrated on urban settings, this study focuses on rural regions, where students often experience unique socio-economic, cultural, and educational barriers. By evaluating these factors, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of why students in Dinajpur struggle with English fluency despite being exposed to the language through formal education.

The findings of this study have several important implications. For policymakers, the research highlights the need for targeted interventions in rural education to bridge the fluency gap between urban and rural students. For educators, it provides insights into the inadequacies in teaching methods and resource availability, encouraging the development of more effective, student-centered approaches to teaching English. Additionally, this study emphasizes the importance of professional development for teachers, with a focus on communicative teaching techniques and fluency-building activities.

Ultimately, by identifying the key factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies and offering potential solutions, this research can help improve the quality of English education in the Dinajpur Education Board, empowering students to succeed academically and in future career opportunities.

Rationale

The ability to communicate fluently in English is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for academic success, professional opportunities, and participation in global conversations. In Bangladesh, where English is a second language and an essential subject in the national curriculum, students' fluency in English is critical for their future prospects. However, despite the widespread teaching of English in schools, many students, especially in rural areas like those under the Dinajpur Education Board, exhibit significant deficiencies in fluency. The rationale for this study stems from the observation that existing research primarily focuses on English language acquisition in urban settings, often overlooking the unique challenges faced by students in rural regions. The Dinajpur Education Board, in particular, is characterized by limited access to resources, undertrained teachers, and socio-economic constraints, which likely contribute to the persistent fluency deficiencies among secondary level students.

By investigating these factors, this study aims to fill the research gap by providing a deeper understanding of the obstacles rural students face in attaining English fluency. The insights gained can guide educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in developing targeted interventions that address the specific needs of students in the Dinajpur region, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and effective language education system.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in several key language acquisition and educational theories

which explain the challenges faced by secondary level students in achieving English fluency in rural areas such as those under the Dinajpur Education Board.

First, Krashen's Input Hypothesis forms the foundation for understanding language acquisition. According to this theory, language learners require comprehensible input slightly beyond their current proficiency level ($i+1$) to improve their language skills. In the context of Dinajpur, limited exposure to English both inside and outside the classroom restricts students' access to this essential input, hindering their fluency development.

Next, Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and communication in language learning. This theory suggests that language is best learned in a social context, where learners engage in meaningful interactions. However, in Dinajpur, the lack of opportunities for real-world English practice, coupled with the traditional lecture-based teaching approach, minimizes the role of social learning in fluency development.

Additionally, Cummins' BICS and CALP Framework distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Many students may grasp CALP, learning academic English, but lack BICS, which involves conversational fluency. This framework is critical in understanding the imbalance between students' academic and practical English skills.

By integrating these theories, this study explores the educational and socio-cultural factors contributing to the English fluency deficiencies in Dinajpur, highlighting the need for more interactive, communicative, and exposure-based teaching methods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant body of literature explores the challenges and factors contributing to English language proficiency, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. These studies provide insights into both global and local factors that impact students' ability to attain English fluency, especially in rural educational settings.

One of the most widely cited theories in language acquisition is Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which suggests that learners need access to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level to progress in fluency (Krashen, 1985). In the context of Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas like Dinajpur, exposure to English is often limited to formal classroom instruction, which rarely offers the immersive or interactive input needed for fluency development (Rahman, 2019). Studies indicate that without exposure to English outside the classroom, students are unable to practice language in meaningful, real-world contexts, thus slowing their progression toward fluency (Alam & Sultana, 2020).

Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory also emphasizes the role of social interaction in language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Research conducted in Bangladesh suggests that rural students lack sufficient opportunities

for social engagement in English, both in and outside of school, due to socio-economic constraints and cultural attitudes towards English (Khan, 2018). This results in limited opportunities for students to develop the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) necessary for fluency, as outlined in Cummins' BICS and CALP Framework (Cummins, 1984).

Several studies have highlighted the limitations of the Bangladeshi secondary education system in developing communicative language skills. The curriculum is largely exam-oriented, focusing more on reading and writing skills than on speaking and listening, which are crucial for fluency (Hamid, 2010). According to a study by Sultana and Alam (2021), this exam-driven approach has led to students developing a theoretical knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary but failing to translate this into practical, conversational skills.

Teacher training and pedagogy also emerge as critical factors. Studies on rural English education in Bangladesh show that many teachers lack proper training in communicative language teaching (CLT) methods, which emphasize interaction, fluency, and real-world language use (Rahman, 2020). Additionally, Bangladesh's National Education Policy (2010) emphasizes the importance of English proficiency but does not provide sufficient guidance or resources for the implementation of CLT in rural settings (Sultana, 2021).

Socio-economic factors further exacerbate these issues. Rural students, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, often lack access to private tutoring, English language media, and other supplementary learning resources that are more accessible to urban students (Khan & Rahman, 2020). These disparities are reflected in the differences in fluency levels between students from rural and urban areas, as noted by Hamid (2010), who argues that English proficiency has become a marker of socio-economic inequality in Bangladesh.

In addition to the broader factors influencing English fluency deficiencies in Bangladesh, several studies have specifically addressed the unique challenges rural students face in achieving language proficiency. Rural-urban educational disparities are a recurring theme in literature on English language learning in developing countries. A study by Hossain (2018) found that students in rural areas, such as Dinajpur, often have fewer qualified teachers, larger class sizes, and fewer educational resources than their urban counterparts. This disparity limits the effectiveness of English language instruction, which in turn affects fluency. Moreover, the infrastructural deficiencies in rural schools, including inadequate language labs and a lack of multimedia facilities, further hinder students' ability to practice and improve their spoken English skills (Rahman & Rahman, 2020).

The role of teacher competence and pedagogical practices in influencing language learning outcomes has been extensively studied. Teachers in rural areas are often under-trained in modern language teaching methodologies, such as Communicative Language

Teaching (CLT), which focuses on fluency and interactive use of the language (Chowdhury & Haider, 2012). In many cases, traditional grammar-translation methods, which prioritize written language over oral communication, remain dominant in rural Bangladesh (Sultana, 2020). Alam (2017) argues that while CLT has been introduced in the national curriculum, its implementation in rural areas like Dinajpur has been slow due to a lack of teacher training and resources. Teachers are often unfamiliar with CLT's focus on interaction and real-life communication, and without adequate training, they revert to lecture-based methods that emphasize rote learning over practical fluency (Chowdhury, 2013).

The issue of teacher motivation is also highlighted in research on rural education in Bangladesh. A study by Rahman (2019) revealed that teachers in rural schools often face demotivation due to low salaries, poor working conditions, and limited professional development opportunities. This negatively impacts the quality of English instruction, as teachers are less likely to invest time in innovative and student-centered teaching practices that could enhance fluency. Additionally, rural teachers may lack access to English language media, which limits their own fluency and thus their ability to model proper language use for their students (Hossain, 2018).

Curriculum-related factors also play a pivotal role in contributing to fluency deficiencies. The Bangladeshi secondary education curriculum remains highly exam-oriented, with a focus on passing standardized tests rather than developing language fluency (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). As Rahman and Sultana (2021) point out, the emphasis on reading and writing skills in exams leads teachers to prioritize these areas at the expense of speaking and listening skills, which are essential for fluency. This exam-centric approach is particularly detrimental in rural areas, where students have limited opportunities for practical language use outside the classroom.

Rana (2022) showed the significant spoken English deficiency among intermediate students in the Rangpur Division of Bangladesh. This research is particularly relevant given the increasing emphasis on English language education.

Moreover, socio-cultural factors in rural regions also impact students' attitudes toward learning English. In some rural communities, there may be less perceived value in attaining English fluency, as students often view it as a foreign or elite language not immediately relevant to their daily lives (Khan, 2016). Research by Khan and Rahman (2020) shows that socio-cultural attitudes toward English can discourage students from practicing the language outside school, reducing their opportunities to improve fluency through social interaction. Parents in rural areas may also place less emphasis on English proficiency, focusing instead on subjects that seem more directly tied to local job markets (Hossain & Begum, 2017).

Furthermore, socio-economic barriers significantly influence English language learning outcomes in rural Bangladesh. Research consistently shows that students

from lower socio-economic backgrounds have less access to English language resources, including private tutoring, English books, and digital learning platforms, which are more accessible to students in urban settings (Hamid, 2010; Rahman & Rahman, 2020). The economic disadvantages faced by rural families often translate into fewer opportunities for students to practice English, further widening the fluency gap between rural and urban learners.

Significantly, the literature indicates that English fluency deficiencies in rural regions such as Dinajpur are the result of a complex interplay of educational, socio-economic, and cultural factors. These deficiencies not only hinder students' academic progress but also limit their future opportunities in higher education and employment, where English proficiency is increasingly important. This review of existing literature highlights the need for more targeted research on rural students' specific challenges in achieving English fluency, and it underscores the importance of addressing these issues through curriculum reform, teacher training, and policy interventions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies among secondary-level students in the Dinajpur Education Board, Bangladesh. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by students and the underlying causes of their fluency deficiencies.

Research Design

The research is structured in two phases:

Quantitative Phase

A survey was conducted among secondary-level 300 students and 20 English teachers from 10 randomly selected schools in the Dinajpur Education Board. The survey collected data on students' self-reported English proficiency levels, their exposure to English inside and outside the classroom, and the teaching methods employed by their instructors. The aim was to identify patterns and correlations between students' fluency levels and the various educational, socio-economic, and contextual factors that may affect their language learning.

Qualitative Phase

To gain deeper insights, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 students, 10 English teachers, and 5 school administrators. Additionally, classroom observations were carried out in each selected school to assess teaching practices and student participation in English language activities. This phase was designed to explore the attitudes, perceptions, and challenges faced by both students and teachers in developing English fluency.

Sample Selection

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure a representative sample of schools and students from the Dinajpur Education Board. The region was divided into urban and rural strata, and schools were selected proportionally from each stratum. A total of 300 students (150 from rural schools and 150 from urban schools) participated in the survey. For the qualitative phase, a purposive sampling method was used to select participants for interviews and classroom observations, focusing on students with varying levels of fluency and teachers with diverse teaching backgrounds.

Data Collection Instruments

Student and Teacher Surveys

The survey was developed based on validated instruments used in previous studies on language proficiency (Rahman, 2020; Alam, 2017). It included both closed and open-ended questions covering topics such as language use, instructional methods, access to learning materials, and socio-economic factors.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and administrators to explore their perspectives on the causes of English fluency deficiencies. The interviews focused on the barriers to fluency, the effectiveness of current teaching practices, and potential improvements.

Classroom Observations

A structured observation checklist was used to assess the frequency and nature of English language activities, teacher-student interactions, and the use of communicative language teaching methods in real classroom settings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis to identify key factors associated with students' fluency levels. Statistical software (SPSS) was used to explore relationships between fluency outcomes and variables such as socio-economic background, teaching methods, and exposure to English outside the classroom.

Qualitative Data

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the interview transcripts and classroom observation notes. The data were coded to identify recurring themes related to teaching practices, resource availability, socio-cultural attitudes, and student engagement in English learning activities.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided with informed consent forms. Participation

was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. Approval for the research was obtained from the relevant educational authorities and school administrations within the Dinajpur Education Board.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it focuses on a specific region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other rural regions in Bangladesh. Additionally, classroom observations were limited to a short period, which may not fully capture the complexity of teaching practices over time.

This methodology combines quantitative data on students' fluency levels with qualitative insights into the educational environment, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies in the Dinajpur Education Board.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study yielded comprehensive data reflecting the factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies among secondary-level students in the Dinajpur Education Board. The findings are presented below, based on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations.

Quantitative Results

Fluency Levels

Out of 300 surveyed students, 68% reported low speaking fluency, defined as a score of 2 or below on a 5-point scale.

Only 15% of students indicated high fluency (score of 4 or 5) in speaking skills, while 35% reported moderate fluency (score of 3).

Exposure to English

Students with daily exposure to English outside the classroom (e.g., through media, conversation) demonstrated significantly higher fluency levels:

Daily Exposure: 70% of these students scored above 3 in speaking fluency.

Limited Exposure: Among students with minimal exposure, only 20% scored above 3.

Teaching Methods

Analysis revealed that students taught using traditional methods (lecture-based, rote memorization) scored an average of 2.1 in speaking fluency.

Conversely, students in classrooms employing communicative language teaching methods had an average speaking fluency score of 3.8.

Socio-economic Status

A comparison of fluency levels based on socio-economic background indicated that:

High Socio-economic Status: 45% scored above 3.

Low Socio-economic Status: Only 15% scored above 3.

Qualitative Results

Interviews with Students

Many students expressed frustration over their inability to practice speaking, stating: "We only read and write in class; there is no chance to speak English."

Students noted the importance of English for future employment but felt unprepared due to insufficient practice.

Interviews with Teachers

Teachers highlighted a lack of training in modern teaching methodologies. One teacher remarked, "I want to teach them to speak, but I am not trained in how to do it effectively."

The majority (80%) of teachers reported using grammar-translation methods, indicating a disconnection between teaching practices and students' needs for fluency development.

Classroom Observations

Observations in 10 classrooms revealed that 85% of classroom time was spent on teacher-led instruction, with little student interaction.

Instances of student speaking activities were limited, averaging 5 minutes per class, predominantly during group discussions or pair work.

Correlation Analysis

Regression analysis indicated that exposure to English outside the classroom was the strongest predictor of speaking fluency ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$).

Teaching methods also significantly predicted fluency outcomes ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$).

Conclusion of Findings

The data suggests that the primary factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies among secondary-level students in the Dinajpur Education Board include limited exposure to English, ineffective teaching methods, and socio-economic barriers. The results underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance English language learning experiences in rural schools.

The findings of this study highlighted several critical factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies among secondary level students in the Dinajpur Education Board, underscoring the complex interplay between educational practices, socio-economic conditions, and exposure to language.

Impact of Exposure to English

The data revealed a significant correlation between exposure to English outside the classroom and students' speaking fluency. Students who engaged with English through media, conversations, or community activities exhibited notably higher fluency scores. This supports Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that comprehensible input is essential for language

acquisition. The limited opportunities for students in Dinajpur to practice English in real-life contexts illustrate a systemic issue within rural education. Many students expressed frustration over their inability to converse in English, indicating a lack of practical application of their classroom learning.

Teaching Methods and Practices

The predominance of traditional, teacher-centered methodologies in classrooms was another significant finding. With 80% of classroom time devoted to lectures and rote memorization, students were deprived of interactive learning opportunities that foster fluency. The study aligns with previous research indicating that communicative language teaching (CLT) methodologies can enhance language proficiency by promoting interaction and practical usage (Chowdhury & Haider, 2012). Teachers themselves acknowledged their lack of training in modern pedagogical approaches, emphasizing the need for professional development programs to equip them with effective strategies for teaching English communicatively.

Socio-Economic Barriers

The socio-economic disparities among students further exacerbated fluency deficiencies. The data showed that students from low-income backgrounds had significantly lower fluency levels, highlighting how access to resources plays a crucial role in language acquisition. This finding reflects broader trends in educational inequality, where socio-economic status directly impacts academic performance and opportunities for language practice. Many students reported limited access to English learning materials and private tutoring, which are more readily available to their urban peers. This inequity raises important questions about the distribution of educational resources and the effectiveness of interventions to improve language proficiency in rural areas.

Cultural Attitudes toward English

The study also pointed to the cultural attitudes toward English within the community. Many students viewed English as a foreign language with little relevance to their daily lives, which can diminish motivation and engagement. This perception is critical, as motivation is a key factor in successful language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). Addressing these cultural attitudes through community awareness programs could foster a more positive perception of English as a valuable skill for future opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the factors contributing to English fluency deficiencies among secondary level students in the Dinajpur Education Board, Bangladesh. The findings highlight a complex interplay of educational practices, socio-economic conditions, and cultural attitudes that significantly impact students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

The results demonstrate that limited exposure to English outside the classroom correlates strongly with low fluency levels. This underscores the importance of practical language use and interaction in language acquisition, affirming the need for students to engage with English in real-world contexts. Additionally, the predominance of traditional teaching methods and a lack of adequate teacher training were identified as critical barriers to effective language instruction. The study also revealed that socio-economic disparities play a significant role in shaping students' access to resources and opportunities for language practice, further exacerbating fluency deficiencies.

To address these challenges, targeted interventions are essential. Recommendations include revising the curriculum to incorporate more communicative activities, providing comprehensive professional development for teachers, and fostering community engagement in English language learning. By implementing these strategies, educators and policymakers can work towards creating a more supportive environment for English language acquisition, ultimately enhancing the fluency and confidence of students in rural areas.

In summary, improving English fluency among students in the Dinajpur Education Board requires a multifaceted approach that considers the educational, socio-economic, and cultural contexts in which these students learn. Through collaborative efforts and targeted reforms, it is possible to bridge the gap in English language proficiency and equip students with the necessary skills for future academic and professional success.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge:

Curriculum Reform

Integrating more communicative activities and real-world applications into the English curriculum could enhance students' speaking and listening skills. Emphasizing interactive methods over rote memorization may better prepare students for practical language use.

Teacher Training

Comprehensive professional development programs focusing on CLT and interactive teaching methods are essential to improve the quality of English instruction. Ongoing support for teachers can empower them to create more engaging learning environments.

Community Engagement

Encouraging community involvement in English learning—through local workshops, conversation clubs, and media exposure—can provide students with additional practice opportunities.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important

to acknowledge its limitations. The focus on a single education board may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions in Bangladesh. Future research should explore similar factors in different contexts to better understand English fluency challenges across the country. In brief, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of English fluency deficiencies among secondary-level students in the Dinajpur Education Board. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, and communities to create an environment that supports effective language learning and ultimately enhances students' fluency and communication skills.

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