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English Language Pedagogy in Bangladeshi Madrasahs: Findings from Classroom Observation

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Abstract:
Classroom observation as a data elicitation tool is used in educational research to capture real pedagogical practices in which teachers and learners are interactively involved in the process of curriculum implementation. The process entails application of mainly three components, such as methodology, materials and assessment on which effective language pedagogy largely depends. The paper reports the findings of classroom observations conducted in ten madrasahs in Chittagong, one of the important administrative divisions of Bangladesh. The objective was to observe how the teachers would adopt the CLT principles, use instructional materials and provide feedback to learners. A carefully developed checklist with 40 criteria under seven categories was used to record the classroom practices. Brief pre-observation and post-observation interviews were conducted with the teachers in order to understand how they planned ahead for class and how they could have performed better. The researcher, a non-participant observer, observed 10 classes—five in the city and five in different villages. The data were analysed qualitatively, and the findings showed evidence of limited application of the communicative principles, highly controlled use of the textbook and inappropriate instructional feedback. Findings of the study will have profound implications for future researcher aspiring work on madrasah education particularly in the areas of teaching methodology, developing materials and undertaking assessment reforms.

Keywords: Bangladesh madrasah education board, classroom observation schedule (COS), madrasah education, national curriculum and textbook board (NCTB); secondary education in Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Madrasahs, the government aided and administered educational institutes imparting both Islamic and secular teachings to a significant number of students constitute the second largest education stream in Bangladesh. Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh governments' endeavour to gradually mainstream the madrasahs through a process of integration with the general education also brings the madrasahs to the forefront of public attention. The growing popularity of the madrasah education is evident in the remarkable proliferation of madrasahs and overwhelming increase of learners studying in them over the last three decades. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS, 2018), the number of madrasahs and students, is 9,294 and 38, 17,248 respectively. This vast number of madrasahs and students indicate that they are popular educational institutions across the country, and provide education to a significant number of the country's total student community.

1.1. Curriculum in Madrasahs

All madrasahs below the tertiary level are regulated by the Bangladesh Madrasah Education board (BMEB), as per the Bangladesh madrassa education ordinance 1978 which started functioning from June 4, 1979. On the other hand, *Fazil* (BA) and *Kamil* (MA) curriculums and examinations are regulated by Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka established in 2013. *Dakhil* or secondary level is of two years and includes grades from IX to X. Apart from curricular and pedagogic practices, the difference between the secondary schools and *Dakhil* madrasahs is that the former includes grades from VI to X where first three grades (VI-VIII) make up the Junior Secondary and the remaining two grades (IX-X) are the Secondary. *Dakhil* madrasahs, on the other hand, usually include grades from I to X where first five grades (I-V) are called *Ibtedayee*, the next three grades (VI-VIII) are Junior *Dakhil,* and the remaining two grades (IX-X) constitute the *Dakhil* level.
 Bangladesh madrasah education board (BMEB) designs the syllabus and curriculum of religion-based subjects and national curriculum and textbook board (NCTB) is responsible for developing the syllabus and curriculum of secular subjects. At the end of the 10th grade students write the year-end *Dakhil* examinations which are held concurrently with the secondary school certificate (SSC) examinations of the mainstream schools across the nation. Successful candidates get the most coveted certificates which are prerequisite for entry into academic and professional domains.

As the highest number of students in *Aliyah* madrasahs is enrolled at the secondary level, the number of *Dakhil* examinees is always larger than those in other board examinations. The following figure shows the ratio of students studying at different levels of madrasahs:
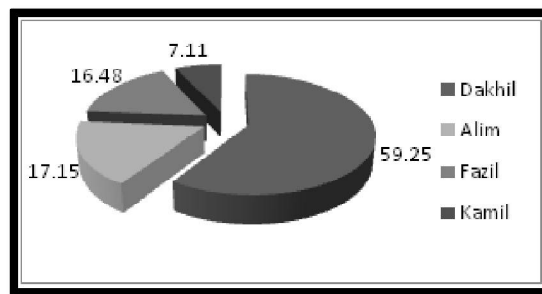
Figure 1: Number of Students at Various Levels of Madrasahs
BANBEIS, 2018

The figure shows that the number of students, as of 2018, studying at the secondary level is far greater than that of the other three levels combined.

Despite increasing popularity of madrasah education in the socio-cultural reality of Bangladesh, the madrasah education has remained underexplored so far as classroom research in the area is concerned. Hence, the objectives of the study were to observe classroom practices from three perspectives: application of teaching methods, dealing with materials and performing assessment. Therefore, the study explores three broader pedagogical issues which include how the teachers in the classroom a) apply principles of CLT approach; b) use the textbook and/or other instructional materials; and c) assess learner performances.

Since the issues stated above for observation constitute the core components of the language curriculum, findings of the study will provide illuminating insights into the prevailing ELT practices in Bangladeshi madrasahs and immensely benefit the aspiring researchers in the relevant field.

2. Literature Review

In educational research, classroom observation has a particular importance as it is "the only way to get direct information on classroom events, on the reality of the programme implementation" (Weir & Roberts, 1994, p. 164). Hence, for a researcher intending to examine the classroom or pedagogical phenomena it is mandatory to have firsthand experience of how teachers teach and learners learn. The COS offers the observers an experience to grasp the total "sights and sounds" or the "classroom panorama" where learning happens. Second, classroom observation is mostly used in tandem with other tools, such as interviews in order to triangulate the findings (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

Dornyei (2007) states two dichotomies inherent in this type of research which include "participant versus non-participant observation" and "structured versus unstructured observation". The participant observation is one where the researcher becomes deeply engaged with the observation process often noticed in ethnographic researches. In addition, Frankael and Wallen (2009) mention "participant as observer" as another form of non-participant observation which requires the researcher to fully participate in the activities of the group being studied, but also to be aware of their role as researchers. Frankael and Wallen (2009) further state that the participant observer can be both "overt" and "covert". In the former, the observer role is easily identified and the learners know they are being observed; while in the latter, the observer is disguised as a learner and the learners do not know they are being observed.

But, in non-participant observation, the researcher remains "minimally involved" or "sit on the sidelines" and watches the classroom without getting directly involved in the situation. The role of "a complete observer" according to Frankael and Wallen (2009) is opposed to that of the complete participant observation where the observer remains completely aloof from the phenomenon under observation and the intended group also remains unaware of the observation being conducted.

In addition, the structured-unstructured distinction is related to observation techniques. In the structured observation the researcher is expected to have specific focus on a list of concrete categories prepared well ahead of the observation schedule. In the un-structured observation, on the contrary, the researcher is required to observe what happens in the classroom first, then, notes down in a narrative, sometimes through maps and diagrams format, what is observed.

Wragg (1994) states a series of observation modes which include a) written account; b) video cassette; c) sound cassette; and d) transcript. Though every mode has its both advantages and disadvantages, researchers tend to adopt the written mode of observation. According to Wragg (1994), the written account has more benefits. For example, it offers immediate and fresh account of what is observed, saves time, and the account can be available for discussion immediately after lesson and that the entire classroom events remain available to the observer at the time of observation.

Dornyei (2007) holds that the main principle of observation is similar to that of the questionnaires that it intends "to have a range of systematic categories which allow the observer to record events quickly by using tally marks" (p.180). He talks about two types of methods often used in observation schedules: a) event sampling and b) time sampling. In event sampling tally mark is put against a particular category while in time sampling, an observer records a category at a fixed interval—30 seconds or one minute and the observer notes down the happenings in the interval. However, some observation schemes, as Dornyei (2007) states, use 'rating scales' so that the researcher may make general judgments about certain features of the classroom observed.

Dornyei (2007) provides two types of categories to capture the observable classroom phenomena: a) low inference categories and b) high inference categories. By low inference categories he means the classroom events about which the observer can readily reach "almost perfect reliability". On the contrary, high inference categories are the

behaviours which the observer notices in the classroom, but cannot reach any particular decisions about their functions or meaning, therefore, requires some reflective judgments.

One of the crucial issues of observational research relates to the question of the observer effect and observer bias. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003), the observer effect refers to the effect the observer may have on the behaviour of the group being observed while the observer bias is the possibility that certain characteristics or ideas of the observer may bias their observation. Though the observers adopt different strategies to minimize the degree of the effect and bias, no observation can be completely free from the observer effect and bias. In this regard, Frankael and Wallen (2009) states: It is probably true that no matter how hard observers try to be impartial; their observations will possess some degree of bias. No one can be totally objective, as we all are influenced to some degree by our past experiences, which in turn affect how we see the world and the people within it. Nevertheless, all researchers should do their best to become aware of, and try to control, their biases. (P, 443)
From the discussion above it is evident that observation is crucial in educational research because it , if appropriately conducted , helps the observer to notice and note down the real classroom panorama unlike other research tools which only give second hand information as the researcher has to trust what is written or said by the participants.

3. Methodology

The observations followed a mixed-method approach combining the 'structured' and 'unstructured' observation categories. According to Weir and Roberts (2004), the 'structured' observation refers to the type of observation that requires the observer to use 'pre-determined categories' through developing a particular checklist while the 'unstructured' observation requires the observer to note down everything that happens in class. In the context of the present study, a mixed- approach combining both the approaches, was used. The rationale for using the mixed-approach is that it provides greater scope for the observer to observe and note down the classroom happenings to the maximum. Moreover, it is humanly impossible for any observer to report everything that occurs in class, and everything that the observer expects to observe may not take place. For this, observation checklist had been prepared well before the observations with scope for necessary changes. Since, "the instrument for wholly unstructured observation is a blank piece of paper" (Weir & Roberts, 2004, p. 169), an 'observer's diary' was used to note down unpredicted occurrences.

3.1. Observation Tool and Observer Role

A comprehensive checklist (Appendix A) was used to observe the classes. The reason for using checklist method for the observation was that checklists ensure a clear focus of observation (Richards & Ferrell, 2011). Moreover, the checklist was used to "ensure relevant steps are noticed and remembered, like a week's shopping list or pilot's landing checks" (McDonough & McDonough, 1997,p.106). The checklist was prepared following 'event sampling' where the observer had to circle or tick the application or existence of a particular category on the basis of a particular behaviour in class. This method was chosen because it would provide, as Dörnyei (2007) comments, an accurate description of the total frequency of the events or procedures observed.

Two other supplementary tools—the observer diary and photographing device—were also used. The checklist included seven categories and altogether 40 criteria to capture maximum classroom practices. The observer diary was used to note down the teacher-learner behaviour and any 'critical incidents' occurring in class which would otherwise go unreported. On the other hand, a photographing device was used to capture classroom artifacts used e.g., realia, classroom displays, work on board, and student work. The researcher was a non-participant observer who sat at the back of the class so to observe the happenings from the vantage point. This type of non-participant observation brought a few benefits, for instance, it a) gave objectivity to the observation; b) helped to work with the structured categories and note down unforeseen incidents; and c) made the class activities least affected by the observer presence.

3.2. Checklist Construction Procedures

The checklist comprised seven sections with a total of 40 criteria. They were preceded by two open-ended pre-observation questions on the class objectives, and also followed by two further open-ended post-observation questions on teacher's reflection on perceived success of the class and aspects that could have been done differently.

Both 'high inference' and 'low inference' categories were included. For example, teacher 'has lesson plan' (criterion no.2) was regarded as a 'low inference' item as the researcher could reach almost a perfect reliability in recording whether the teacher had a lesson plan or not. On the other hand, the teacher 'gives encouraging corrective feedback' (criterion no. 31) was a 'high inference' item as the researcher would not be able to tap the exact level of learner encouragement, but would have to form high inference about it.

3.3. Justification for One-time Observation

As mentioned previously, 10 classes were observed and each was observed once. Repeated observations become essential when teachers or learners are given some treatment to notice the change in the pre and post-treatment effect. In addition, one-time observation can be justified on the ground that repeated observations will capture the exact and usual picture of the class because, the presence of the observer him/herself will have some effect in classroom no matter how many times observed. Weir and Roberts (2004), in this regard, opine that a teacher's performance and interaction varies significantly from class to class. Therefore, "repeated measure reliability' is not appropriate for real time observational data" (p.172). Moreover, the objective of COS was mainly to observe how teachers would implement their knowledge of CLT principles in class. We collected data about the teacher's orientation with CLT through interviews and questionnaires.

The focus of the observation was on how the teachers would apply their knowledge, not what they knew. Possible extra care due to observer's arrival might affect their knowledge (what), but not the way they applied that knowledge (how). Therefore, observation validity is not at risk.

3.4. Ethical Issues

Permission was taken from madrasah Principals/Superintendents, English teachers prior to the observation schedule. They were confirmed that the information gathered from observations would be used only for research and academic purposes. Moreover, English teachers of the classes observed signed on the observation form which indicates their consent.

3.5. Checklist Adaptation

The checklist was adapted from the one used for communicative orientation of language teaching (COLT) programme developed by Allen, Frochlich, and Spada (1983). The COLT scheme was part of a large scale research project Development of Bilingual Proficiency (DBP) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). The aim of the project was to investigate the L2 proficiency and its development in classrooms which focused on aspects of communicative competence. According to Nunan (1989 b, p. 85), the COLT scheme was one of the most successful and sophisticated instruments to capture and measure the nature and features of interaction in language classroom. On the other hand, the checklist used in the Mexican teacher-training programme was adapted because of its suitability for the present study as well as for its well framed and sequenced criteria based on communicative features of language classrooms.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

In classroom observation schedules two possible threats to validity surface: the misplacing of observational notes and second, the transformation of a regular class into a special observation class (English in Action, 2011). Threats from both the sources were checked. Use of the diary and camera in addition to the checklist helped us to put the data for safekeeping. On the other hand, generalizability factor was of less concern because the objective of the COS was "in the *nature* of what teachers can do by way of ELT practices" (English in Action, 2011, p.3), and not in generalizing and quantifying the classroom practices.

Observation schedules were analysed with reference to the predetermined categories. The purpose was to comprehend the nature of pedagogy in the sampled classes from the CLT perspective. As the classroom observation is essentially a qualitative data collection tool, its analysis adopted a modified qualitative protocol following a three-stage procedure. First, all the sampled classroom observations were reported to obtain a general view of the classroom practices; second, the observed practices were listed in accordance with the applicable criteria stated in the checklist; and third, findings were arrived at through organising the listed practices into certain pedagogic themes.

	Madrasahs	Location	Teacher	Attendance	Material	Unit/ lesson	Objectives	Focus	Time	Date
1	Baitush Sharf Adarsha Kamil Madrasah	City	Male	TS-80 SP-65	EfT	6/4	Increasing reading and listening skills	Reading	11.50-12.30	17/10/2016
2	Subhania Aliah Madrasah	City	Male	TS-44 SP-26	EfT	5/1	Enriching vocab. and familiarizing contents	Reading	10.25-11.05	19/10/2016
3	Al Humaira (RA.) Mohila Fazil Madrasah	City	Male	TS-34 SP-17 (All girls)	EfT	4/4	Developing reading skills and enriching vocab.	Reading	11.10-11.55	22/10/2016

	Madrasahs	Location	Teacher	Attendance	Material	Unit/ lesson	Objectives	Focus	Time	Date
4	Pukuria Ansarul Ulum Fazil Madrasah	Rural	Male	TS-125 SP-80	*EfT*	11/1	Familiarizing contents and enriching vocab.	Reading	11.15-12.10	25/10/2016
5	Chandpur QHRDU Alim Madrasah	Rural	Female	TS-49 SP-17	Guide book	NA	Teaching English conditionals	Grammar	10.15-11.00	28/10/2016
6	Jameya Ahammadia Sunnia Kamil Madrasah	City	Male	TS-119 SP-108 (Section-B)	No material	NA	Teaching voice change and sentence types	Grammar	9.15-9.55	21/10/2016
7	Palegram Hakim Meah Shah Alim Madrasah	Rural	Male	TS-80 SP-28	No material	NA	Teaching prepositions	Grammar	10.15-10.45	27/10/2016
8	Jaldi Hossainia Fazil Madrasah	Rural	Male	TS-75 SP-33	*EfT*	6/2	Enriching vocab. and understanding content	Reading	9.00-9.45	26/10/2016
9	Rangia Ghuna Mansuria Fazil Madrasah	Rural	Male	TS-79 SP-26	No material	NA	Learning direct and indirect narration	Grammar	12.00-12.40	26/10/2016
10	Darul Ulum Aliah Madrasah	City	Male	TS-79 SP-47	*EfT*	7/1	Increasing reading skills	Reading	10.20-11.00	13/10/2016

Table 1: Summary of Classroom Observation Schedules (COS)
Note: EfT (English for Today); TS (total students); SP (students present); NA (not applicable)

3.7. Classroom Observation and Analysis

Ten classrooms, five from Chittagong city and five from the rural area, were observed. The observation schedules continued for 16 days from October 13, 2016 to October 28, 2016. The study observed the nine-grade classes as this level was crucial due to the upcoming *Dakhil* examinations which would be centrally held the following year. Five observations have been reported here considering the variety of pedagogic practices. Each observation is followed by analysis which attempts a critical enquiry into the observed phenomena.

3.7.1. Observation 1

The teacher entered the classroom at 11.50 a.m. The class was equipped with multimedia facilities. The students had entered the classroom on time, though a few students were 16 minutes late. The teacher had a lesson plan which displayed a general familiarity with the subject matter, and reflected his adequate preparation and planning. The teacher took the attendance of the students and asked the class to locate a particular unit "Unity in Diversity" in the textbook *English for Today*, and to have a glance on illustrations depicted. He then used multimedia to display geographical locations of Bangladesh and its neighbouring countries, particularly India. Then, the teacher conducted a number of activities. First, he selected important words and phrases from the text, and asked to guess their meanings which the teacher later verified

with the answers shown on the screen. Second, he conducted an activity on 'giving suitable headings to paragraphs'. The teacher asked the learners to read paragraphs from the text, and choose suitable headings from the randomised ones displayed on the screen. The activity was challenging, though not above their academic and cognitive level. Mid-way through the activity, the class suffered a power-cut which disrupted the multimedia exhibit, and deflected learner attention. The teacher then turned to the textbook again, and set homework for the following class. The class ended at 12.30 PM.

3.7.1.1. Analysis

The medium of instruction was English with occasional use of the native language-Bangla. Teacher-learner interaction was found satisfactory. Though the teacher emphasised fluency, learners were seen to be less responsive. Instead of authentic materials the teacher used a few digitized contents on the textbook prepared solely for pedagogic purposes. A number of assessment tools e.g., vocabulary check, comprehension questions, information transfer exercises were used. The teacher showed a moderate skill of classroom organization particularly in managing disruptive learner behaviour. The physical environment was safe, academic ambience was conducive, and the learning was equally accessible to all.

3.7.2. Observation 2

The teacher entered the class at 10.25 AM with the prescribed textbook and printed instructional materials. He started the class by explicitly stating the objectives and subject matter of the day's class. First, he wrote a list of words on the board with their Bangla equivalents, and asked the students to copy them down. Then, the teacher started reading out the text, and translating it into Bangla. After that, he gave an activity on vocabulary building from the book which required the learners to supply meanings to a set of words as used in the text. The activity was, to some extent, challenging, but not extremely difficult. Only one student out of 26 could perform the activity. Then, the teacher conducted another activity. He asked five passage-based questions. Though the textbook instruction required 'pair work', the teacher conducted it as an individual work which resulted in low interaction between the learners. As the teacher ran short of time, the activity had to be stopped halfway through the class. The class continued till 11.05 AM.

3.7.2.1. Analysis

The teacher made every possible effort to engage the learners in learning, and increase interaction in class through instructional strategies and encouraging feedback. First, for instance, he started monitoring the activity; second, he inspired the learners to speak English putting less emphasis on accuracy and more on fluency; third, the teacher was very caring in behaviour, respectful in attitude and facilitating in pedagogic role. Materials used were all textual in type and pedagogic in purpose. The teacher assessed the learners through questions from the textbook. It is to be noted that out of five questions, four were factual and only one was inferential which revealed that the teacher lacked in assessment strategies. However, he was consistent in his presentation, and no distraction in the learner attention was noticed. But we observed that the time management was slightly flawed as the teacher failed to distribute the time fairly across all the activities. Nonetheless, the teacher had good control over the class, and no disruptive behaviour from the learners was noticed during the observation. What needs special mention is the room décor. Many colourful posters with famous adages written on them added to the academic ambience of the classroom.

3.7.3. Observation 3

The teacher started the class almost abruptly without following any lesson plan and stating lesson objectives. He asked the students to open the textbook, and locate a unit
entitled "Unity in Diversity". First, he asked a student from the front bench to stand up, and read out the first paragraph of the passage, and the rest to listen to her. After the reading was over, the whole class had to select difficult words from the first paragraph. Eight students raised their hands, and asked the meanings of a few difficult words. The teacher explained the words clearly often with Bangla equivalents. Three students, all from the front bench, read out the whole passage in turn. While the passage was being read out, the teacher focused his attention on language form, and emphasised the syntactic aspects of the text often comparing them with those of Arabic. Then, he asked the learners five yes/no questions from the textbook. No homework was set for the next class. The class duration was 40 minutes from 11.10 to 11.55 AM.

3.7.3.1. Analysis

The class followed the traditional grammar translation method so far as classroom interaction, teacher role and classroom activities were concerned. Interaction in every form—pupil to pupil or pupil to teacher—was limited. The teacher role was that of a 'lecturer' which delimited the scope for interaction. The class strictly adhered to reading from the textbook which was used in immensely controlled way making no connection and reference to the society and culture. Furthermore, he did not conduct any language activity from the textbook neither did he prepare any 'non-textbook-based tasks'. On the other hand, very limited assessment procedure was carried out in class which was insufficient to measure learner understanding. Moreover, the teacher provided less opportunities and poor stimuli to learners for interactive and collaborative activities. Teacher feedback to learner response was not inspiring. However, there were occasions for non-verbal positive feedback from the teacher when the students failed to answer questions. No well thought pattern for class organisation was observed. The teacher had complete control on the learners as a result no off-task behaviour was noticed. The classroom was small, and was equipped with properly arranged furniture.

3.7.4. Observation 4

The aim of this class was to develop reading skills through a passage from the textbook. The students, the teacher said, would have content knowledge, and also learn new vocabulary. Their understanding of the passage would be measured through different assessment tools and other activities, he added. I sat at a vantage point to observe the class which was indeed a large one. First, he wrote a few words from the textbook on the board with English synonyms and Bangla equivalents. Then, he asked a student (boy) to read out the first half of a passage from the unit "Renewable Energy". After he finished his part, the teacher asked another student (boy) to read the rest. He now asked the class to look into the passage to identify difficult words. Three girls and two boys raised their hands, and asked the meanings of a few words and phrases which were: 'sticky hot', 'shoots up', 'concentrate'   and 'stinky'. The teacher, then, asked the students a few questions to test their understanding of the passage. Very few learners, only 6 out of 80, could answer them. Finally, the learners were given an information gap activity. The teacher was moving around to monitor them. The activity was over, but he could not check their work properly. The bell for the next session rang.   The class started at 11.15 and ended at 12.10 PM.

3.7.4.1. Analysis

The class followed the communicative approach but to a limited extent which was evident in the learners' involvement in learning and their interaction with the teacher. In a large class of 80 students, group work would have been more effective, but we noticed the teacher conducted individual work which did not ultimately pay off. Moreover, though the lesson had enough scope for multimedia application, the teacher did not bring in any multimedia device because, as the teacher thought, "technology kills time and sometimes causes disruption due to frequent power cuts". The class was a mixed-gender one, and the girls outnumbered the boys. Surprisingly though, the teacher invited only the boys to read from the textbook which was tantamount to gender bias in class. In addition, the teacher asked factual questions only and did not formulate diverse questions—inferential, judgmental, and evaluative—which would have engaged the learners creatively and critically with the text.

3.7.5. Observation 5

On entering the classroom at 10.15 AM the teacher stated the objectives of the class that she would teach transformation of English sentences from the complex to the simple. She did not bring any textbook, but a guide book on grammar and composition was noticed. First, she wrote one complex sentence on the board, 'If you read more, you will learn more' and asked the class to identify what kind of sentence it was. Two boys raised their hands, and answered correctly. Then, the teacher transformed the sentence into a simple one, and wrote on the board the rules of transformation and asked the learners to note them down. Next, the teacher wrote three more complex sentences on the board, and asked the students to change them into simple sentences. After that, she divided the class into four mixed-ability groups, and assigned them an activity. Every group would select their group leader, and other members would assist him/her to write five complex sentences. Next, the teacher asked the group to exchange the five complex sentences among the groups who would now transform the complex sentences into simple ones. The learners, however, could not complete the activity due to time constraint. The teacher asked the class to do the activity as homework for the following day. The class ended at 11.00 AM.

3.7.5.1. Analysis

The class focused on grammar, and followed a combined approach. First, the teacher taught a particular grammar item in a deductive, discreet and de-contextualized way; then, adopted an approach that involved the learners in group work. This implies that teachers modify teaching methods in different ways to suit the learner and learning contexts. More importantly, instead of government prescribed textbook, the teacher brought in a 'guidebook' which was also an indication that she needed a support material in addition to the prescribed one. In addition, she used the material in a 'minimally controlled' way-i.e., she used it as a starting point for her class which later provided freedom for her own choice and selection of grammar items and sentences from other sources. Finally, the class was, to some measure, interactive though the learners found less scope for learner-initiated interaction in such a form-focused class. None the less, the teacher's endeavour to engage the learners with learning in her own personalised way showed signs of ingenuity in teaching.

3.8. Interview Analysis

As mentioned previously, the teachers were briefly interviewed (interview questions are in the checklist, Appendix A) before and after the classroom observations. Through pre-observation questions the teachers were asked what their students would learn after the class. All the teachers specifically stated the learners would have fair idea about the topics they were going to touch upon in class. In answer to the second question, only 3 teachers out of ten could convincingly answered that their lessons were based on the lesson objectives clearly mentioned in the textbooks and since all the textbooks were written by the same writers following the same curriculum guidelines, their lesson objectives would naturally relate to the goals of the course. In reply to the post observation questions, all the teachers expressed similar opinion that due to time constraint, they could not satisfactory complete the planned lesson for the class. Two teachers, however, claimed the presence of the observer affected the usual ambiance of the classrooms.

4. Discussion on Findings

The classes observed reveal minimal implementation of the communicative approach. It is observed that teachers take the lead throughout the class whereas learners for much of the time are at the receiving end. The classes are moderately interactive. The 'learning festivals' to use Coleman's term (1987) to refer to engaged learning, was found to be absent. Though the language of instruction in three-fourths of the classes was English, no learner spoke in English in response to the teacher questions. Most of the questions the teachers asked can be termed as 'closed-ended teacher questioning'. In addition, the use of instructional materials was limited to the textbook, with no support materials. Furthermore, learner assessment system was partial and faulty. What follows is a brief discussion of the observational outcomes in relation to the English pedagogical practices.

All the teachers report that they have received pedagogic training, but it is noticed that their classes largely adhere to the traditional grammar translation method (GTM). The teachers are mostly in control of the classroom practices particularly in activity initiation and classroom management. Most importantly, they were indifferent to creating conditions for learner autonomy and opportunities for task involvement, meaning negotiation and peer mediation. Moreover, most of the classes, eight out of ten, do not reflect any well-laid out plan. The process of interaction, on the other hand, is always teacher-activated. No specific pattern of learner generated interaction was observed. However, there is minimal evidence for student focused activities, but again much of them are form-focused and teacher initiated. The teachers are found to be interested in learners' individual work, rather than group or pair work though conducting individual work becomes impractical in large classes. Out of ten classrooms observed, six classes focused on reading skill plus vocabulary, the rest on grammar. This clearly shows that most of the secondary English classrooms still emphasise teaching English structures following grammar-translation method.

In all the classrooms observed the textbook *English for Today* (classes IX-X) was the only material used. Out of ten classes online material to supplement the textbook was used in one class only. Therefore, the textbook plays a vital and dominant role in the classroom, and the teachers fully depend on it.

Teachers in all classes attempt to measure the learner understanding of the lessons through different elicitation tools and techniques, such as questions, facilitating and scaffolding. For example, in order to tap learner comprehension level, teachers ask questions to elicit learner response which also provide 'limited' opportunities for learner-teacher interaction. It is 'limited' in that it could not generate learner-learner interaction in class, and no strategy from the teacher has been noticed to promote such interaction. Moreover, most of the questions asked by teachers are factual though on rare occasions there are inferential questions too. Though factual questions—asking the learners to identify facts and figures from passages—are used as interaction launcher, they do not call for reflection on attitudes or beliefs. Furthermore, it is found that teachers very often restrict their questions to front benchers and more articulate students, and in some cases, to the boys only where the class is a mixed-gender one. This practice prevents the class from being fully interactive. Gender-bias classes, where boys are preferred to girls for interactive sessions, have risk to create female-hostile environment which may leave psychological strain on the girls. In addition, the monitoring of the teachers particularly during group work is found to be at the level of simple supervision because it fails to engage the learner with their work, and generate teacher-student interaction through scaffolding and feedback. Lastly, it has been noticed that most of the teachers provide feedback on learner response but, in some cases, it is only non-verbal positive feedback.

5. Conclusion

The study reports classroom observations conducted on ten secondary madrasahs in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The purpose was to comprehend the pedagogical practices particularly the application of CLT principles, use of instructional materials and assessment. The research was motivated by the fact that though madrasah education in Bangladesh occupies the second largest education stream, the area remains under-researched which is evident in the absence of adequate reliable studies focusing on what exactly happens in the classroom—how learning-teaching occurs. Findings show limited application of the communicative principles, extremely textbook-based teaching and inappropriate classroom assessment. The study, it is hoped, will inspire the researchers in the relevant field to explore more potential research areas and identify major impediments so as to improve the English pedagogy in secondary madrasahs in Bangladesh.

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Appendix

A.   Checklist For Classroom Observation Schedules (COS)

Classroom Observation Checklist

Information about the classroom observed

Institution: _____ *Date:* _____   *Instructor:* _____   *Class:* _____ *Section:* _____ *Text:* _____ *Unit:* _____ *Lesson:* _____   *Total students:* _____ *Present:* _____ *Class duration:* _____ *to*_____

Pre-Observation Questions
a) What will your students learn after the class?

_____

b) How are the objectives for today's lesson related to the goals of the course?

_____

A	Preparation The teacher	Yes	No			
1	starts the class on time					
2	has lesson plan			Fair	Limited	Not Observed
3	clearly states specific objectives for the class					
4	has required and sufficient equipment and/or materials to conduct the class					
5	has proper time plan/management for lesson and activities					
	Comments					
B	Activity					
6	Nature :	Group work		Pair work		Individual work
7	Type: (underline) role-play language games scrambled sentences poster show jigsaw puzzles information gap picture strip story answering questions writing on the board storytelling, matching sentences substitute Tables grammar activity, dialogue etc. (mention if any other):					
8	Level:	Above		Proper		Below
9	Instruction:	Clear		Confusing		Not obs.
10	Time allotment:	Not sufficient		Sufficient		More than suff.
11	Learner feedback (Verbal/non-verbal)	Fair		Limited		Not obs.
	Comments					
C	Communicative features	Fair		Limited		Not observed
12	Use of TL (target language)					
13	Use of authentic materials					
14	Multimedia application					
15	Interaction between teacher and learner					
16	Teacher role in class is that of a	Manager			Facilitator	
17	Learner role in class is that of a	Communicator			Receiver	
18	Teacher's emphasis on	Fluency			Accuracy	
19	Talk time in class	Teacher more			Learner more	
20	Learner modality	Listening	Speaking	Reading		Writing
	Comments					
D	Materials					
21	Materials type	Text		Audio		Visual
22	Source /purpose of materials	Pedagogic		Non-pedagogic		Semi-pedagogic
23	Use of materials/course book	Highly controlled		Semi-controlled		Minimally controlled
	Comments					
E	Focus on language	Fair		Limited		Not observed
24	Form (Grammar/Vocabulary)					
25	Function (illocutionary acts)					
26	Discourse (Cohesion/coherence)					
27	Sociolinguistics (language in social contexts)					
	Comments					

F	Assessment & Feedback The teacher	Fair	Limited	Not observed
28	asks questions to tap learner understanding			
29	takes questions from students			
30	explains answers with examples			
31	gives encouraging corrective feedback			
32	provides students with opportunities to mention problems, concerns with the class orally or verbally			
33	gives homework			
Comments				
G	Organization The teacher	Yes		No
34	follows effective transitions between topics of discussion			
35	relates the previous class with the present			
36	draws attention of the whole class			
37	manages students' disruptive behaviour skillfully			
38	manages time all through the class			
39	divides time between the teacher and the learners			
40	ends class on time	Yes		No
Comments				

Table 2

Post- observation questions
a) Do you think your students learned as you expected?

_____

b) Is there anything that you could have done better or differently?

_____

_____   _____

Signature of the observer   Signature of the teacher