

English Language Teaching-Learning Practices in Madrasas: A Case Study in Perspective of Bangladesh



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ABSTRACT: This research aims to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions of English teaching and learning practices in Bangladeshi madrasahs. This mixed methods research collects data using questionnaires, observations, and interviews. The participants of this research include students, teachers, and principals from several madrasahs in Khulna district. The study sought to uncover practical barriers related to infrastructure, curriculum, and societal issues. Additionally, it explored potential solutions to these challenges. The findings revealed that teaching-learning and technological aids as well as teachers are inadequate. Government should take necessary steps to overcome these obstacles. Additionally, economical problems in students must be solved, along with an effective teaching method must be followed by arranging training for the teacher.

KEYWORDS: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Lingua franca, Madrasa, Teaching-Learning, Teachers' and students' perceptions

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of language proficiency has gained significant attention in the realm of education, particularly in countries with diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds. One such context is that of Madrasahs, Islamic educational institutions that are deeply rooted in tradition and have played a vital role in shaping the academic landscape. Madrasahs have not only been centers of Islamic studies but have also evolved to incorporate a range of subjects including English language education. This research endeavors to investigate and shed light on the progress of English education within Madrasahs, as compared to conventional schools, and to explore the unique challenges and dynamics that influence English language acquisition within the Madrasah system.

Bangladesh Madrasah Education started its activity independently in 1979. With the passage of time, several amendments have come to pass. In 1978, humanities and science faculties were included at the Alim level. Dakhil level is being considered the equivalency of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) since 1985, and Alim being considered as the HSC equivalent since 1987. Humanities, science, business and technical education has been included with madrasah education. Meanwhile, a law has been passed for Fazil and Kamil levels to be considered equivalent with bachelors and master's degrees in general education. In 1971 after the independence of Bangladesh, steps were taken for the modernization of madrasah education. Bengali, mathematics, English, social science, general science was made compulsory. In 1978 the Madrasah Education Board was formed under the Ordinance for the Modernization of Madrasah Education. The board has faced difficulties in recruiting teachers for science related classes. Although the government has been trying hard, the lagging is still seen employing teachers not only in science related subjects but also in English.

The research will address a series of fundamental questions aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of English education in Madrasahs. Firstly, the study will analyze the extent to which Madrasahs have progressed in teaching English when compared to conventional schools. This comparative perspective will allow us to gauge the effectiveness of language instruction methodologies employed in both systems.

Additionally, the research will delve into the adequacy of the English textbook contents in meeting the knowledge demands of Madrasah students. By evaluating the alignment between the content of English textbooks and the practical language requirements of students, we aim to uncover potential gaps that might hinder optimal language acquisition.

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Furthermore, the study will explore the intricacies of managing English language learning alongside traditional Arabic subjects in Madrasahs. This aspect examines the students' ability to navigate between two diverse linguistic and academic domains, providing insights into the challenges posed by this dual academic approach.

Lastly, an important focus of this research is to identify and analyze the obstacles that are unique to Madrasah education in the context of English language learning, obstacles that are distinct from those faced by mainstream education. By comparing the challenges experienced by Madrasah students with those faced by their counterparts in general education, we aim to provide a comprehensive view of the factors hindering English language proficiency in Madrasahs.

Statement of the Problem

English is an international language and a lingua franca in many sectors in the world. The Madrasah board in Bangladesh has started teaching English to cope with other general boards since 2013. However, the issues regarding teachers' proficiency, together with their lacking in numbers, and students' socio-economic situations are the reasons behind the barrier's madrasahs are facing. Nevertheless, this research aims to address them.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate and analyze the perceptions of teachers and students regarding English language teaching and practices in Madrasahs
2. To analyze the practical obstacles and challenges faced by Madrasah education system
3. To propose some possible solutions

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to investigate madrasah students' condition of English language. Though our sole focus was on the students of class nine and ten, along with their teachers, the firm purpose has been to understand the overall atmosphere of the English subject in class nine and ten of Madrasah Education System. For this reason, the following questions are formulated.

1. What are the teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching and learning practices in Bangladeshi madrasahs?
2. What significant impediments does the Madrasah Education confront?
3. What are the possible solutions to overcome the perceived barriers?

Theoretical Framework

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to language education that focuses on developing communicative competence in learners. In CLT, the emphasis is on using language for real communication rather than solely as a set of grammatical rules to be memorized. This approach encourages students to actively engage in language use, promoting both fluency and accuracy. One key principle of CLT is the creation of meaningful and authentic communication tasks, such as role-plays, discussions, and problem-solving activities. By engaging in these activities, learners practice using the language in context, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

Moreover, CLT recognizes the importance of interaction in the language learning process. Collaborative activities, pair and group work, are commonly employed to simulate authentic communication, allowing students to negotiate meaning and practice language in a social context. An important reference for CLT in language teaching is the work of Richards and Rodgers (2001) in their book "Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching." They provide an in-depth exploration of various language teaching methodologies, including CLT, offering insights into its principles and practical implementation. (Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. Cambridge University Press.)

Definitions of Key Terms

Dakhil: It is equivalent to SSC (Secondary School Certificate). After passing this stage, students can enter Alim, which is equivalent to HSC (Higher Secondary School Certificate).

Madrasah Board: It is similar to general boards, such as Jashore Board, that controls everything in all Bangladeshi madrasahs.

Language Learning: It is the acquisition of a new language in order to communicate and express thoughts in it.

Basic Skills: This term means the abilities and skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing here in a particular language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a critical and systematic analysis of existing research, scholarly articles, books, and other sources relevant to a particular topic or research question. It serves as a foundation for understanding the current state of knowledge in a specific field and helps researchers identify gaps, trends, and areas for further investigation. The primary purpose of a literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on a given topic. This involves summarizing, synthesizing, and evaluating the information available in the selected sources. A well-conducted literature review not only demonstrates the researcher's familiarity with the existing body of work but also helps to contextualize and justify the need for new research.

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Madrasah Education

In 1979, Bangladesh Madrasah Education began independently. Over time, amendments occurred, including the addition of humanities and science faculties at the Alim level in 1978. Dakhil became equivalent to Secondary School Certificate (SSC) in 1985, and Alim to Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) in 1987, incorporating humanities, science, business, and technical education. Fazil and Kamil levels were equated with bachelor's and master's degrees. Post-1971 independence, efforts were made to modernize madrasah education with compulsory subjects like Bengali, math, English, social science, and general science. In 1978, the Madrasah Education Board was established, facing challenges in hiring science and English teachers despite government efforts. (bmeb, 2018)

English Teaching in Bangladesh

English teaching in Bangladesh has a rich history dating back to the British colonial period, where English was first introduced as the language of administration and education. Since gaining independence in 1971, Bangladesh has continued to place a strong emphasis on English language education. English is a vital component of the national curriculum, and it is widely taught in schools and universities across the country. Proficiency in English is seen as essential for higher education and job opportunities, making it a crucial part of the education system in Bangladesh.

English Language in Madrasahs

English language instruction in madrasahs has evolved significantly over the years. Traditionally, madrasahs in the Indian subcontinent primarily focused on religious education in Arabic and Persian. However, the incorporation of English language teaching began gaining momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries during British colonial rule, as English became an essential medium for modern education. This shift allowed madrasah students to access a broader range of knowledge. Today, many madrasahs continue to offer English language classes alongside their religious curriculum to help students better navigate the modern world and enhance their employment prospects (Edcation, 2020).

Related Literature Review

Many researches have been conducted in this field. Researchers have encountered not only positive results, but also some negative ones. They have found out problems as well as suggested possible solutions to them.

Chowdhury (2022) finds out, after conducting qualitative research, that students in the madrasa from a reflexively traditional stance, lag economic progress and western development programs, and largely resist English as a language of development. Most of the students are instrumentally motivated for learning English than integrative motivation and their motivation level is high. There is a statistically significant difference in their motivation for learning English based on their parents' monthly family income, and their parents' education level. Madrasah students' result reveal no significant difference in their motivation for learning English with regard to gender, says Rahman (2021), after conducting a study; the setting for this research was Rangpur district, Bangladesh. Alim level students of Aliya madrasah in Bangladesh was the population of the study from which a sample of 300 students were selected (from six Aliya madrasahs) through a simple random sampling method.

Golam (2020), conducting qualitative research, interviewing with the students, teachers, and principles, addressed Alia Madrasahs as reformed religious schools that have so far, the privileges. He reports that the immediate need for teacher training in English language learning. Salma (2020) comments that English language can be introduced with the modern teaching methods in madrasahs so that they can be brought at par with mainstream or with other students who belong to other boards. Because only reading and writing skills are focused in the syllabus, textbooks, classroom, and testing; whereas listening and speaking skills are either informally practiced very little or avoided from all arenas as Ruman (2021) found out, conducting a mixed-method research approach with 11 teachers and 152 students. Talha (2020) said unskilled teachers, shortage of expert teachers, training institutions, lack of enough salary scale and recognition, limited work opportunity in public and private sphere and so on are responsible for madrasahs' lackings.

Nehal (2016) suggests that English language syllabus that can be introduced with modern teaching methods in madrasa education. Nasreen (2023) recommended, mentioning teaching methods in foreign countries, that if the proper system is followed, English not only in madrasahs but also in general boards shall be improved. At first, only important words will be taught. Then, they shall learn to make sentences out of them. Both students and teachers must communicate with each other in the target language. It appears to be direct method in teaching English. There is now a great deal of pessimism among the madrasa ulama who largely feel that the situation will not "change for the better." Given their highly negative and hostile views of America, it is no wonder that 76 percent of madrasa students and teachers questioned believe that "waging jihad against America" is justified. (Mumtaz, 2009). That madrasa curriculum has inbuilt elements of radicalization is not borne out by any logic or facts. (Huda, 2000)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, in this study the researcher used a mixed-methods approach to achieve a sharp understanding. Quantitative research is a research method that emphasizes on measuring the collection and the analysis of data. It is formed from a deductive approach where the focus is placed on the investigation of theory, shaped by empiricist

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and positivist philosophies. Qualitative research is a process of naturalistic inquiry that looks into an in-depth analysis of social phenomena within their natural setting. It focuses on the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena and depends on the direct experiences of human beings as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives (Creswell, John W. Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research).

Research Tools

In order to gather comprehensive data on the English language system in Bangladeshi madrasas, a mixed-method approach was employed. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys administered to teachers, and students. The survey included likert scale questionnaires regarding the curriculum, teaching methods, resources, and proficiency levels in English in class nine and ten.

Qualitative data had been obtained through in-depth interviews with English teachers and principals. Open-ended sections were given to both teachers and students in form of questionnaires. These responses and interviews delved into their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities of incorporating English into the madrasa system, as well as the cultural and religious considerations that may impact language instruction. The principals and the teachers had provided their personal opinions on the likert scale close-end questionnaires together with some open-ended questions.

Additionally, classroom observations were also conducted to gain insights into the actual teaching practices and student engagement during English language lessons. These observations had to provide a firsthand understanding of the instructional methods being used and the extent to which they align with the stated curriculum. The researchers also personally asked them about some grammatical questions. They tried to skip to test their speaking and listening skills as their teachers said they did not have the opportunities to acquire them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in teaching-learning research offer valuable insights into the dynamics of educational processes, shedding light on effective strategies and areas for improvement. Through rigorous investigation and analysis, researchers uncover patterns, trends, and correlations that inform our understanding of how students learn and how educators can optimize their teaching practices. These findings not only contribute to the scholarly discourse in education but also have practical implications for curriculum development, instructional design, and the overall enhancement of learning outcomes.

Findings of Quantitative Data

The researchers have conducted questionnaires with two phases. Phase 1 contains likert scale questionnaires, and phase 2 is open-ended. There were 50 participants including both teachers and students. They are selected teachers who have from 0 to more than 10-years' experience as well as students of 9 and 10 including both genders.

Close-ended part of the questionnaires

The same questionnaires were given to both students and teachers.

For students: Class nine and ten

For teachers: Experience from 0 to 15 years

Gender: Both male and female

Table 1: The perceptions of English teaching-learning practices

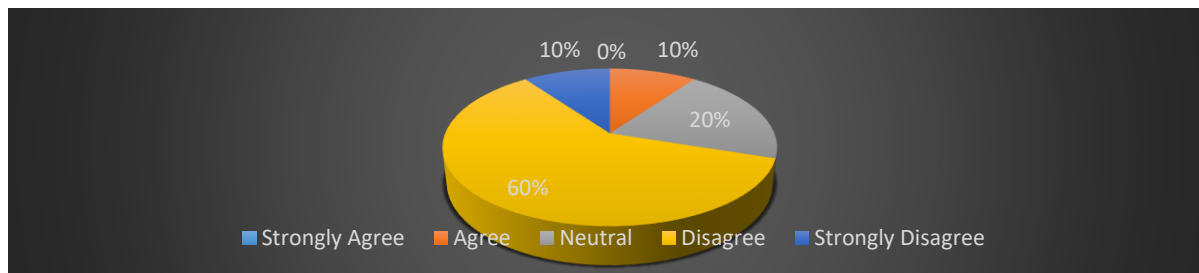
Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The English language curriculum in Bangladeshi Madrasahs adequately prepares students for real-life communication situations.	0	5 10%	10 20%	30 60%	5 10%
The English textbooks used in Bangladeshi Madrasahs are relevant and up-to-date.	0	10 20%	10 20%	25 50%	5 10%
The English language teachers are proficient enough to effectively teach English	10 20%	20 40%	10 20%	10 20%	0

To learn teaching-learning perceptions of both students and teachers, the researchers conducted the three statements above. It appeared that 30 (60%) participants among 50 denied that the curriculum prepares students for real-life situations.

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Figure 1

The English language curriculum in Bangladeshi Madrasahs adequately prepares students for real-life communication situations.



The study also revealed that 50% people expressed that textbooks are not relatable to the needs for communication. Both teachers and students said that the teachers are proficient, and some added that they should be increased and trained. 40% agreed though 20% denied that is also not avoidable.

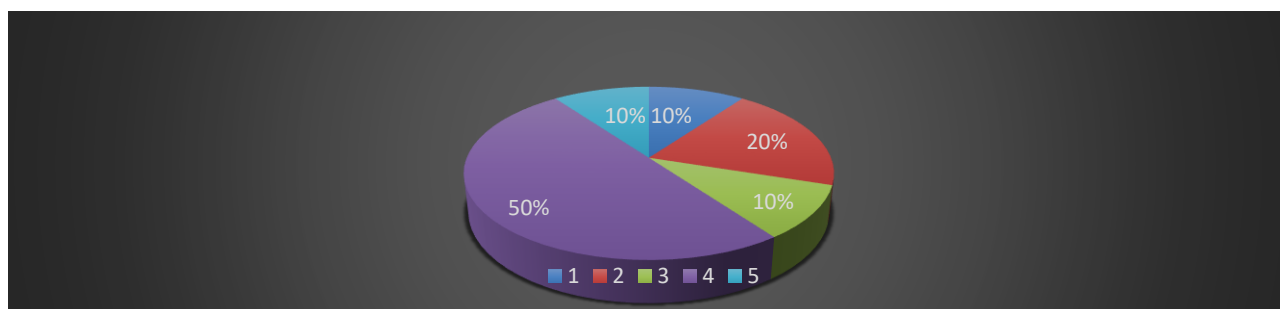
Table 2: Barriers of English language in Madrasahs

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The teaching-learning materials are adequate.	5 10%	10 20%	5 10%	25 50%	5 10%
Audiovisual aids and online materials are available.	5 10%	15 30%	20 40%	10 20%	0
Students in Madrasah have sufficient opportunities for practicing and using English outside the classroom	5 10%	5 10%	5 10%	5 10%	30 60%
The English syllabi incorporate all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)	5 10%	0	24 48%	16 32%	5 10%

To understand the obstacles madrasah students face, the researchers provided the statements above. 25 (40%) participants disagreed with the first one above.

Figure 2

Audio visual aids and online materials are available



Though 50% demanded they have technological advances, the minority (10%) wins here, as the materials are not sufficient for the students. A shocking fact came out that 60% strongly disagreed that there is no chance for the students to practice English in and outside of the classroom.

The last barrier seems the main reason behind the problems. The syllabi actually do not incorporate all four basic skills. 48% appear to be ignorant about the system.

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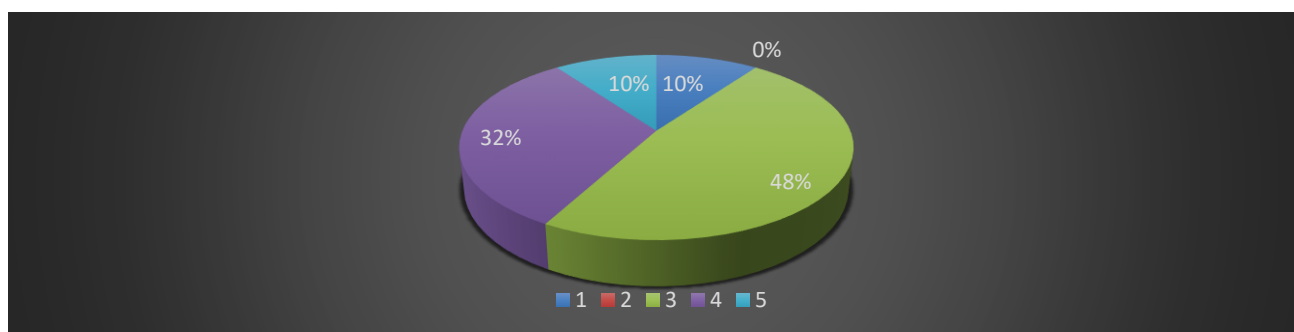
Table 3: The suggested solutions to the barriers

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The government should take necessary steps to improve madrasah education.	4 8%	36 72%	10 20%	0	0
The English language system needs improvement to meet the learner's needs.	5 10%	40 80%	3 6%	2 4%	0
The current English language teaching methods are effective.	5 10%	6 12%	4 8%	36 72%	0
The government should take necessary steps for improving English language education.	10 20%	35 70%	5 10%	0	0
Government should arrange training programs for teachers	5 10%	20 40%	15 30%	10 20%	0

The study received responses about the possible solutions to the obstacles. 73% agreed that it is the government's responsibility to reshape madrasah education.

Figure 3

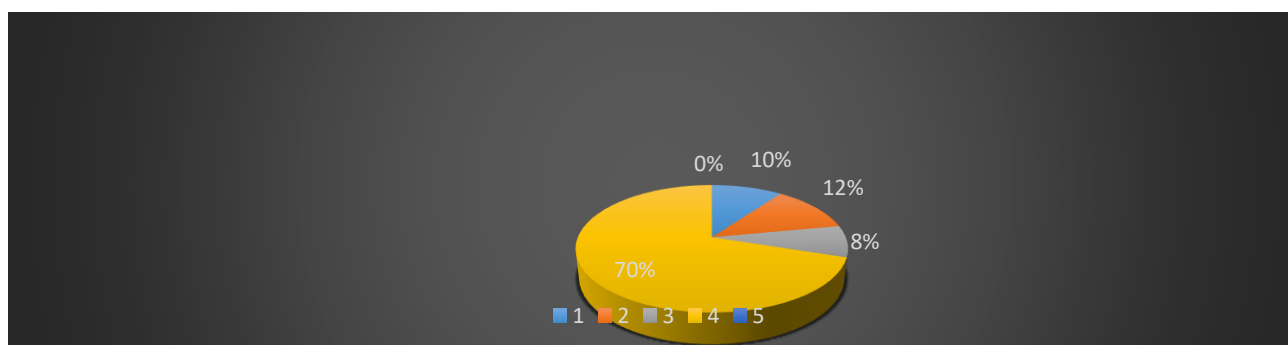
The English syllabi incorporate all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing



There is no doubt that the language system needs to be changed as 80% agreed on that the current teaching method is absolutely not effective, as 70% disagreed with the statement that says they are. They must be changed to overcome the barrier.

Figure 4

The current English language teaching methods are effective.



Another solution the researchers found was that the government should itself take steps to improve language education. 70% is a big response for the demand. The researchers were 30% ignorant of the public opportunity to have training. However, 40% expressed that the government should arrange training programs for the teachers.

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Findings of Qualitative data

Open-ended part of the questionnaires

The same questionnaires were given to both students and teachers.

For students: Class nine and ten

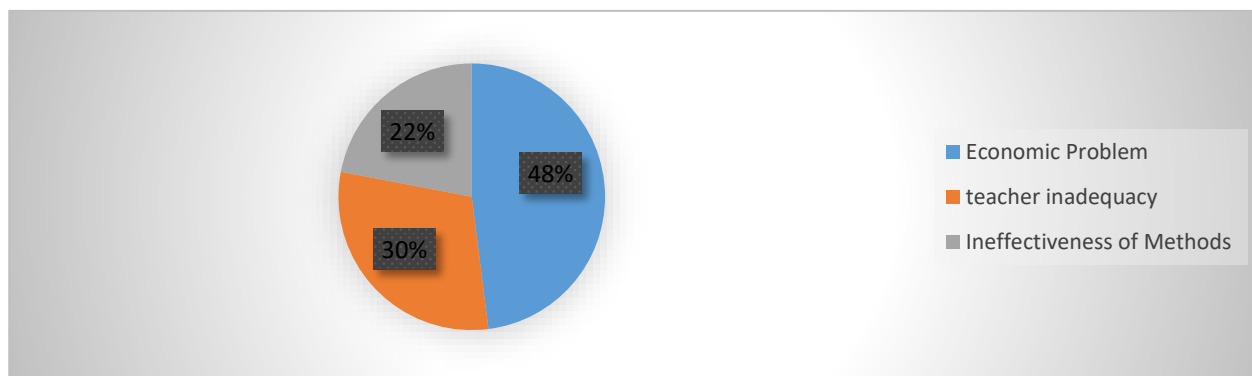
For teachers: Experience from 0 to 15 years

Gender: Both male and female

The study has been conducted with open-ended questions among the participants, including both teachers and students. The Principals of those madrasas participated spontaneously. 50 people have mainly talked about three major obstacles.

Figure 5

Problems and solutions



They also have given some possible solutions to overcome those problems.

24 participants among 50 have stated that most of the students are poor to buy even the stationeries they need e.g. calculator and other things. Local or central administrative bodies should see to the matter. 15 participants have demanded that teacher inadequacy is visible. The government should appoint some new teachers. Lastly, 11 people have said that teaching methods are not effective to teach English for communicative purposes.

Teachers' Interview

Teachers' Responses about the perception of teaching and learning practices have been taken. According to them, English language teaching in Bangladeshi Madrasahs faces a set of unique challenges. While there is a genuine effort to incorporate English into the curriculum, the overall approach is often traditional and lacks modern teaching methodologies. The focus is primarily on rote memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary, rather than fostering practical communication skills. Additionally, the limited exposure to real-world English usage outside the classroom hampers the students' ability to apply what they learn.

About the current practical barriers, they commented that one of the major barriers is the shortage of qualified English language teachers in Madrasahs. Many teachers are themselves not proficient in English, leading to a transfer of outdated teaching methods. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient resources, such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, and technology, inhibits the incorporation of more interactive and engaging teaching techniques. Class sizes are often large, making it challenging for teachers to give individual attention to students, hindering their language development.

They also suggested some ideas to overcome the impediments. There should be an emphasis on professional development for English language teachers. Providing regular training sessions, workshops, and access to modern teaching resources can significantly enhance their proficiency and teaching methods. Additionally, efforts should be made to recruit qualified English teachers or offer incentives for existing teachers to improve their language skills. The integration of technology, such as interactive language learning apps or online resources, could supplement traditional teaching methods and make learning more engaging for students. Collaborations with language institutes or organizations that specialize in English language education could also provide valuable insights and support. Moreover, creating opportunities for students to interact with native English speakers or participate in language exchange programs can expose them to authentic language use and improve their communication skills. Lastly, investing in updated and culturally relevant English language textbooks and materials would contribute to a more effective learning environment.

In summary, addressing the shortage of qualified teachers, embracing modern teaching methodologies, incorporating technology, and fostering real-world language experiences can collectively enhance the English language teaching and learning practices in Bangladeshi Madrasahs.

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DISCUSSION

In the examination of the close-ended questionnaires, a noteworthy revelation emerges concerning the perceived efficacy of the curriculum in real-life communication situations. A substantial sixty percent express dissent, indicating widespread dissatisfaction, while a modest ten percent affirm satisfaction, primarily constituted by teachers. Intriguingly, the preponderance of positive responses from educators underscores the influence of their extensive training within the system, urging a discerning consideration by the relevant authorities. Turning attention to the evaluation of textbooks, a fifty percent consensus asserts their relevance and currency. Noteworthy dissent emanates from a minority of young teachers, while a majority of students adopt a neutral stance, signaling a nuanced issue deserving careful scrutiny.

In the assessment of teaching proficiency, an overwhelming majority attests to the competence of instructors, with a mere twenty percent registering disagreement. Although a potential bias is acknowledged, the correlation with educators graduating from esteemed universities hints at a plausible explanation. A poignant observation surfaces as newly appointed teachers express a desire for improvement, citing inadequate remuneration within non-governmental Madrasahs as a deterrent to their continued service. The deficiency in teaching-learning materials comes into sharp focus, with only a handful of Madrasahs equipped with audiovisual aids and internet facilities, yet deemed insufficient by students. Former educators from private schools draw attention to a comparative disadvantage in Madrasahs, prompting urgent appeals for assistance to educational authorities, often met with negligible results. A disconcerting revelation pertains to the dearth of opportunities for English language practice, both within and outside the classroom, stemming from a syllabus deficient in all four language skills. A resounding eighty percent advocate for an alignment of the system with learners' needs, while seventy-two percent urge government intervention to rectify the prevailing issues. The glaring inadequacy in teaching methods surfaces, with a paltry two teachers possessing knowledge of English Language Teaching (ELT) methods. This prompts a resolute call for government-sponsored training programs, not only for Madrasah teachers but also for educators in schools, envisioning a transformation in teaching efficacy. The blame game unfolds as some teachers attribute students' English reluctance to financial constraints and fear, particularly among the economically disadvantaged. The consensus among educators and principals underscores the imperative for financial support from both the government and philanthropists to alleviate these barriers to education.

A meticulous examination of students' language proficiency unveils a spectrum of competencies, ranging from grammatical adeptness to stark vulnerabilities. Strikingly, the universal inability to converse fluently in English underscores the urgency for a pedagogical paradigm shift. A pragmatic suggestion surfaces, advocating the amalgamation of the Direct Method, a hint of Grammar Translation, and elements of the Audio-lingual Method as a holistic strategy to address the multifaceted challenges confronting language education in Bangladesh.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Madrassa education encounters several significant impediments that hinder its effectiveness and inclusivity. These challenges include a limited curriculum scope centered on religious studies, inadequate integration with modern educational practices, insufficient teacher training, resource constraints, and the pervasive social stigma associated with Madrasa education. To overcome these barriers, various solutions are proposed, encompassing curriculum diversification, modernization of teaching methods, improvement of infrastructure and resources, community engagement to combat stigma, government support through adequate funding and policy initiatives, collaboration with mainstream educational institutions, and the implementation of robust monitoring and evaluation systems. These recommendations collectively strive to create a more inclusive and comprehensive learning environment for Madrasa education.

Possible Solutions to Overcome Perceived Barriers

Diversify Curriculum:

- To integrate modern subjects to provide a more comprehensive education.
- To incorporate life skills and vocational training. (Sultana, 2023)

Modernize Teaching Methods:

- To provide regular teacher training programs on modern pedagogical approaches.
- To encourage the use of technology for effective learning.
- To improve Infrastructure and Resources:
- To invest in upgrading facilities and learning materials.
- To ensure access to libraries, laboratories, and recreational areas.

Community Engagement and Awareness:

- Foster community involvement to diminish social stigma.
- Promote the importance of a balanced education.

Government Support:

- To allocate sufficient funds for Madrasa education.
- To establish policies that facilitate integration with the mainstream education system. (Nehal, 2016)

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Collaboration with Educational Institutions:

- To encourage partnerships between Madrasas and conventional schools.
- To facilitate exchange programs for teachers and students.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

- To implement a robust system for monitoring educational quality.
- To regularly evaluate the effectiveness of implemented reforms.

These recommendations aim to address the multifaceted challenges faced by Madrasa education, promoting a more inclusive and comprehensive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

Research on teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching and learning practices in Bangladeshi madrasahs reveals a diverse range of opinions. While some educators appreciate the traditional approach emphasizing religious studies, others express concerns about the lack of modern subjects and practical skills. Significant impediments facing Madrasa Education include outdated curriculum, limited resources, and a gap in incorporating contemporary knowledge. Additionally, there are challenges in aligning religious teachings with broader societal needs. Possible solutions to overcome these barriers involve curriculum reforms to integrate both religious and modern subjects, increased investment in educational resources, and professional development for madrasah teachers to enhance their pedagogical skills. Bridging the gap between religious teachings and real-world applications is crucial. Subsequently, addressing the multifaceted challenges in Bangladeshi madrasah education requires a comprehensive approach. By fostering a balanced curriculum, providing adequate resources, and empowering teachers, there is potential to create an educational environment that meets both traditional and contemporary needs, promoting holistic development among students.

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