

INTERACTIVE DIGITAL CONTENT OF PRIMARY CLASS FIVE ENGLISH FOR TO-DAY (NCTB) BOOK: CHALLENGES IN A BANGLADESHI CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This article tries to investigate the impediments that primary class five teachers face in conducting classes with interactive digital contents. Since 2016, interactive digital contents have been attracting both English language teachers and learners of primary schools in Bangladesh. It has been started as a part of the government's policy of 'Digital Bangladesh'. It has brought an interesting turn to teaching and learning EFT (English for Today) classes especially in a stimulating and interactive way. In this article the researcher tries to address challenges that an English teacher faces in a Bangladeshi classroom to carry out digital lessons. At the same time it focuses on other related factors that thwart teacher's using digital contents in classrooms. As research instrument the study uses interviews with 22 primary teachers (as the basic focus group--FG) of semi urban, rural govt. and non-govt. schools. The study explores the scenario also from learners' perspective to shed light on the issue from other lenses. The learners' group comprises of 121 from different schools with whom several sitting was done addressing the issue. The same was done with the focus group also. These have supported the paper to recommend steps to overcome the constraints of using digital contents in an English language (L2) classroom.

Keywords: Educational technology, CASLA, digital contents, EFT, teacher autonomy, TPACK

INTRODUCTION

Interactive digital contents have made a breakthrough in existing primary English language classrooms in Bangladesh. The integration of digital technology in parallel to the existing printed book versions of all primary subjects in classrooms is a very modern approach to the country's primary education. From class one to five, all subjects' printed contents are digitalized to make the classes more interactive and learner-centered. Once downloaded, it helps one learn the lessons even by being at home

without coming to schools. Provided with a laptop and a projector, any classroom can utilize the scope of using digital/e contents and get the benefit of learning, teaching and using English language in an interactive way: Through this initiative, all of Bangladesh's twenty million primary school students will be able to access their entire curriculum via any device. In public schools, it is being accessed on the computers that the government has already integrated into over 1,500 digital classrooms across the country as part of

its Digital Bangladesh vision. (<https://digitalcontent.ictd.gov.bd/>)

The initiative of the Government's 'Digital Bangladesh' by 2021 is the most pragmatic one to make the country technologically sound and vibrant. In this process to make the Bangladeshi learners a strong part of the global population, digital contents are introduced in primary education. In computer assisted second language acquisition (CASLA), a learner's participation is very authentic with positive learning outcomes:

They motivate and engage students in the learning process. Students are motivated only when the learning activities are authentic, challenging, multidisciplinary, and multi-sensorial. Videos, television, and computer multimedia software can be excellent instructional aids to engage students in the learning process. In addition, sound, color, and movement stimulate the students' sensorial apparatus and bring enjoyment to the learning process (Rahman, 2009).

In this regard, among others a teacher's role has become more demanding than it had been before (Keengwe, Onchwari et al.2008). Because, teachers are the most important and vital stakeholders in any educational set-up and innovation. For primary schools, teachers' roles are just like the role models for the young learners, learners (have to) follow them blindly. Teachers' use of digital content is encouraging and supporting for learners in many ways. It not only maintains the flow and exchange of knowledge but also helps one develop skills in operating activities digitally. It enhances one's, as teacher and learner, confidence level and critical power of analysis in the most

authentic way. Rather than following the 'banking' method of teaching traditionally as a deposit system (Freire, 1970) of information, digital contents make a shift for creating spaces for self –development, self-learning, self-regulation and thus autonomy for a learner.

The pedagogical innovation and dimension a digital content classroom requires is dependent on a number of issues. Along with tangible and visible facts, intangible-- teachers' willingness, positive/negative perception about technology, social and demographic position, economic condition are also important factors in this regard. How far the classroom and the role of the teacher have been evolved at the advent of this technology oriented approaches to the primary education raises a number of questions. Are teachers comfortable with this innovation, is it easy or stress- free for them to conduct the classes with the targeted goal they want to achieve? Apart from infrastructural challenges, a teacher's ideological and psychological, socio-economic barriers regarding this issue have not been explored so far. So the study projected in this article addresses the challenges and barriers of using digital contents from Bangladeshi primary teacher's perspectives.

Focus/Purpose of the study

The study has the highlighted issue

1. What intangible challenges in using digital contents in primary English for Today (EFT) classes do teachers face in Bangladesh?
2. What might be the solutions to these?

Theoretical fundamentals:

Researchers found that execution of any innovation in any institute depends very much on the willingness or perceptions of teachers. Teacher's perceptions motivate him/her to integrate the new into the mainstream:

“Understanding the pedagogical, psychological, and cognitive barriers to the successful use of information technology may be a vital precondition for improving the utilization of computers and other technological aids in the educational process (Benzie, 1995).

A teacher's mental position, thinking process, social, cultural, institutional identity and teaching qualities influence his/her teaching in a classroom. Several studies poised that teacher's views/attitudes are a major facilitating/non-facilitating factor in the use of digital contents in classroom. Barsotti & Martins (2011) opine on teachers' comfort or familiarity with some basic ICT applications and their possibilities as hampering factors for their digital classes. Added to that is a country's

“cultural and ... and individual variables, such as values, fears, motives and 'representations' (or perceptions) and structural variables such as functions and roles came together to form the culture of educators and educational managers (Lamy, 2011).

Lamy (2011) refers to the culture's objects of a country as a strong 'element of intervention'. If a country's culture does not

welcome any new change in the society, then that innovation would not work in the country. In this line, Rogers (2003) emphasizes on five important factors that affect digital technology in a classroom—'relative advantages, compatibility, complexity, observability and trialability. These affective digital factors help a teacher be aware of screening the pedagogical demands of the primary EFT classes not necessarily to 'alter pedagogy' (Rastogi and Malhotra, 2013) for a digital content classroom, rather s/he needs to accommodate the new with the existing one.

Countries like Nepal and India researchers (Dhital, 2018; Jha & Shenoy, 2016) also maintain that using digital contents in a classroom requires modification on the part of the teachers' existing roles and practices. Along with that, as the digital contents help a learner learn the lesson independently, a teacher might suffer from identity crisis (Jha & Shenoy, 2016). Many teachers in several studies have shown their fear that digital contents might withdraw their role as they have been playing that manually. This creates discomfort for many, but virtual contents are not for replacing teachers in real life, a mistaken challenge for many, it is rather a 'force multiplier that can increase the scope and impact of a teacher'.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research instruments:

This case study uses one research instrument—interviews with both the teachers, as the primary focus group (FG) and learners. As a research instrument, interview is used mostly for the reason that the real feedback would come out from the

participants which is more reliable and authentic.

Participants: They are from different rural, semi-urban and urban government and non-Government schools. There are some restrictions about exposing the names of the participants and the institutions. The researcher tries to use those in the most prescribed ways.

Rationale: Although using digital contents in primary classes is a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, it needs a critical address so that about this innovation as pedagogical material in the classroom can have a serious attention from policy makers to the practicing classroom teachers at the very beginning.

FINDINGS

Socio-economic barriers: Most researchers (Barbieri and Light, 1992) on gender specific use of technology ‘found that girls do less technical tasks and do not sit as often as boys in the mouse position’. In Bangladesh perspective also with others in the world, teaching, specially EFL, is mostly a feminine career (Santos, 2008) with low income which hardly supports a family. They “... are relatively deprived of access to the advantages of technology. Women are underrepresented in almost every aspect of ICT implementation in Bangladesh” (Khan et al.2012). In a study Sharma (2003) finds that countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia and other developing countries’ ICT use is thwarted by a significant social factor—‘the low status of women’. These countries’ social practices do not think that women’s ICT education is important as their existence is always home-bound as the care taker of family and domestic chores:

“Men disproportionately occupy academic, management and technical roles, which by virtue of the nature of the work provide easier access to the internet and related technology” (Khan, Hossain & Clement, 2012).

Another challenge for the teachers is unwillingness to shift to new challenges by adapting digital contents in a classroom. In the study, Keller, Lindth, Hrastinski, Casanovas, and Fernandez (2009) found that teachers “primarily accept and use the features of learning that influences their traditional roles the least, as the transition to a new role might be too challenging” (p. 67). Teachers’ background history as learners were receptive which was complete, unquestionable and ‘to be transmitted as was received’ (Celani and Collins, 2005). Teachers’ educational and personal histories most of the time is dominated by how they were trained/taught by their teachers—this ‘ideological obstacles’ mold them as new teachers with the old mind set-ups.

Ideological challenges: A teacher’s own educational culture influences him/her to practice the same in the professional world. This holds back a teacher to transform to new, “...teachers were uninterested to pedagogies that did not conform to the transmissive learning cultures to which they themselves had been exposed”—from a research on transferring learning cultures from a learner (when the teacher had been the learner) to a teacher (Lamy, 2011). The discomfort in agreeing with the duality between two ‘different’ pedagogical cultures, of him/her as a learner in the past and the new as a teacher, does not keep more options

for a teacher for the reputation of becoming a successful techno-pedagogical one.

As a foreign language teacher who wants to integrate ICT into his/her teaching, one needs to know at least 7 software applications-- windows, Word, browsers, e-mail software, Power point, Excel, and anti- virus and security software (Davies', 2006 ICT 'can do' lists): "...for each there is a range of essential tasks that teachers should be able to carry out to feel comfortable working with that software". If ICT knowledge is not enough to support a teacher to be a good facilitator in his/her teaching practices, this sense of weakness makes one uncomfortable with some ICT applications (Barsotti and Martins, 2012). Thus a teacher can become anxious and unwilling to use digital technology in classroom.

Also there, a barrier for teachers' to become digitally literate to use digital materials in a classroom, is "...slow recognition and insufficient reward for teachers participating in technology mediated activity and difficulty in justifying the time taken" (Bianco, 2005). Added with that, here in Bangladesh, teachers are burdened with heavy work - loads and also have to do a lot of administrative jobs, so that they do not get time to get training on computers and designing their lessons with technological aid (Mou, 2012).

Barriers from learners' perspectives

From learners' viewpoints about the problems they face in digital content classes: Digital contents help us to develop our listening, reading and understanding power.

If teachers follow some easy methods, we can follow them easily. Our classroom 'talking' is needed. Sometime 'Bangla' comes to my mind, I forget English words. Our classroom has less light, no electricity. If related things are kept along with the books' contents, that would help us to learn (slightly rephrased from the original utterances of learners).

In interviews learners felt shy and not responding to the questions. They feel interested about the digital content classes, but classrooms are not well decorated. When teacher fixes the cables and other things, learners make the classes very noisy. They suggest for using subject related videos apart from the textual one for better understanding.

DISCUSSION

In response to the question, 'When do you like to change the teaching techniques?--I do not like changes in teaching techniques in my classes'—80% teacher participants are not willing to address the innovation that e-contents bring in a classroom. About digital literacy and handling digital devices, 58% respond in an unclear way. The risks for taking new challenges is not praised or even not remunerated, so 87% respondent replied negatively.

Table 1: Teachers' perceptions about the challenges, digital literacy and mentoring (in Percentage)

No	Target points	Yes	No	Neutral
1.	I don't like changes in teaching techniques other than books and copies	82%	15%	3%
2.	I know to use power point presentation, email, internet resources, word program	55%	37%	12%
3.	I always like to take the classes as my teachers did, somehow my mentors make the influence on me	72%	13%	15%
4.	Digital elements are not easy to handle	84%	9%	7%
5.	When something go out of order, I feel uneasy in the classroom	89%	7%	4%
6.	When out of order no helping hand is immediately available	88%	10%	2%
7.	I do not get any incentive for digital classes	98%	0%	2%
8.	Fixing digital elements is time consuming	74%	14%	12%
9.	I like to be techno-pedagogical	50%	50%	0%
10.	Technology reduces and relaxes teacher's job, so teachers have less activities in classroom	67%	23%	10%

About fixing digital elements like connecting projector, sound boxes is time-consuming (74%), uneasy and uncomfortable (89%) for many teachers that hamper smooth mentoring in classrooms. Having technical supports in time is not easy and available. Majority (72%) likes to shift the past way of teaching to the new as the most convenient way to be practiced always in the classroom. The desire to be techno pedagogical is a young generation teachers' passion and other 50% takes it negative factors that they think classroom management needs only books and other supporting things like pen, pencil and copies. Giving the students access to digital activities in a classroom makes a teacher less active—only 23% gives a negative answer to this maintain an unclear picture of the scenario.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The above mentioned challenges need positive solutions what can be done massively by teachers', students, parents,

policy makers' intervention. The rapid growth of the digital world is irresistible and we need to be a strong part of it. Teachers' role as Sanskrit 'Gurus' with the divine affiliations is beyond question maintaining the word 'gu' as darkness and 'ru' as light. A teacher is the 'Guru' who brings the light to the darkness of ignorance. Exposure, training and open mindedness to technology can make a teacher confident. An expert teacher Dr. Syed Manzoorul Islam opines that the socio-economic position of a Bangladeshi teacher needs to be modified. 'A teacher works whole day to manage his/her livelihood, how he can manage time/scopes to be autonomous and confident', he reflects in the opinion sharing session on the digital issues in a Bangladeshi classroom (2019).

Teacher/professional development: Pre-service and in-service training for teachers' professional development are two important supports to promote teachers' willingness to digital activities in and outside classroom. The unwanted 'digital-divide' must not be

practiced between rural and urban schools, English and Bangla medium schools, rich and poor, remote and mainland, cosmopolitan and border areas, male and female, Government and non-Government, privileged and under privileged. Limited access to digital classrooms with limited amenities in some selected areas must not be maintained.

Teachers' autonomy/education is another important factor. An autonomous teacher can make an autonomous learner what ensures a learner's critical reflection, self -initiation, decision making, sharing and monitoring progress and of evaluating progress to see how much learning is achieved. It encourages independent action (Sophocleous, 2011). Little (1995) comments:

It is unreliable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they themselves do not know what it is to be an autonomous learner; in determining the initiatives they take in their classrooms, teachers must be able to apply to their teaching those same reflective and self -managing processes that they apply to their learning.

For building an autonomous self, a teacher needs to construct a strong teaching identity in language teaching. Identity formation takes place as 'it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience.' Hamid and Nguyen (2016) illustrates the typical roles a Bangladeshi teacher plays in teaching an additional language. Traditional English teacher is the role model, absolute authority of knowledge in the context of some Asian countries, including Bangladesh:

...while English teachers in the past prepared students mainly for examination, they are now expected to equip them with communicative resources needed for their functioning as global citizens. ...For this, English teachers are supposed ...to be able to work with children who are increasingly becoming digital natives.

Teacher education and learner autonomy can make successful use of technology in a classroom. About resources whether tangible or intangible, Bangladesh has huge problems. It is pedagogical innovation which can improve the situation. Kohler and Mishra (2009) while introducing TPACK framework for teachers opine:

There are three types of knowledge that an instructor needs: pedagogical knowledge (the science and art of teaching), technological knowledge (knowledge about information and technology), and content knowledge (actual subject that is taught) (Mou, 2016).

It is now a professional demand for a teacher to maintain content, pedagogical and technological knowledge. Technology resourced classroom is not the ultimate source to good learning and teaching of a classroom. It is a supporting teaching/learning aid in a classroom. Teachers, aware of combining and using these for meeting glocal necessity are the most vital factors now in a Bangladeshi English language classroom.

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