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**The Difference in the Speaking Proficiency in English between the Students of the English Medium Schools in Mohammadpur Area (New Dhaka) and in Postogola-Sutrapur Area (Old Dhaka): A study**

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**ABSTRACT:** *We expect that the students of English medium schools are good and fluent in English than the students of Bengali medium schools in Bangladesh, and usually we find them as per our expectation. But in some cases we do not find it true. The students of the English medium schools of Mohammadpur area in Dhaka are fluent enough in English but the students of the English medium schools in Postogola-Sutrapur area of Old Dhaka are not. In this study, I have explored the fact that there is a big difference in the speaking proficiency in English between the students of the two areas. Not only this, the research work has found out that the socio-economic factors of the two areas are mainly responsible for this condition. We see in the study that the educational and the social-cultural and economic backgrounds of the parents and teachers of the two areas are different. We also see how these factors affect achieving the speaking proficiency in English. The study suggested the measures to improve the speaking proficiency of the students of Postogola-Sutrapur area staying in the existing socio-cultural and economical frame, as it is not possible to change the social and economic scenario of the area within a short time.*

**KEYWORDS:** speaking in English, English language, English medium schools, socio-economic factors, learning a foreign language

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## INTRODUCTION

Speaking in a foreign language is harder than reading, writing and listening, as it happens in real time. When we speak or talk to somebody, we cannot edit or revise what we have already said. So it is obvious that achieving the speaking proficiency in a foreign language is not an easy task. English is a foreign language to the students of our country. So to be an efficient user of this language they need a supportive environment. For this reason, we see that the students of the English medium schools of our country are good in speaking English while the students of Bengali medium schools are not. However, a difference has been observed in the speaking proficiency between the students of the English medium schools of two different areas – one is of New Dhaka (Mohammadpur area) and the other is of Old Dhaka (Postogola-Sutrapur area). I have worked at the English medium schools of both the areas as an English teacher and found that the students of the English medium schools of Mohammadpur area are better in speaking English than that of the students of the English medium schools of Postogola-Sutrapur area. We know that the students of

the English medium schools gradually get themselves prepared for taking 'O' level examinations. As the syllabuses of the English medium schools are almost same, the reasons behind this variation in the speaking proficiency between the students of the two areas should be investigated for the benefits of the students. Actually, in case of any language acquisition variation occurs due to some influencing factors. Let us see the most obvious sources of influence on linguistic variables according to sociolinguistics. "The most obvious source of influence on linguistic variables are the speakers themselves, i.e. the kinds of persons they are and the experiences they have had. Various kinds of difference between speakers have been widely and exhaustively studied by sociolinguists, including region of origin or of present home, socio-economic status, sex, race and age." (Hudson 184). Now, my study has made an attempt to explore the factors behind the difference in the speaking skill between the students of the two areas.

We have found that the educational, social-cultural and economic backgrounds of the parents and teachers of the two areas are different, which have played a significant role in acquiring the speaking skill.

Some other important factors such as the poor salary of the teachers, lack of motivation in the teachers and students, lack of teachers' training to improve the speaking proficiency, etc., have also found in case of the schools in Postogola-Sutrapur area. The findings of this study will help the students of the country improve their speaking proficiency in English, as it illustrates the factors, which influence acquiring the speaking proficiency in the foreign language.

### **Objective**

The first purpose of my study is to explore the difference in the speaking proficiency in English between the students of the English medium schools of the two areas. Secondly, the aim of this study is to find out the factors responsible for the difference and then providing some suggestions to overcome the problems, which are creating obstacles in acquiring the speaking proficiency in English.

### **METHODS**

Considering the short time and costs for conducting the study, two English medium schools from each of the areas have been selected as the samples of this study. As the number of English medium schools in both the areas is not huge, the selected schools are representative of the whole.

The subjects of this study are the students of standard V and Standard VII, and they are homogeneous in the sense that all of them are the native speakers of Bengali. The students of Standard V and VII have been chosen as these two classes are in the mid-level towards 'O' level. So the two classes are the representative of the entire schools. The average number of the students of the English medium schools of Postogola- Sutrapur area is 10 to 12 in class V and 8 to 10 in class VII, while it is 30-50 in Class V and 25-40 in class VII in the schools of Mohammadpur area. I've selected 10 students of each class by random sampling as the subjects of this study.

As the schools' authorities gave me a limited time to give the speaking tests to their students, I selected three types of items which can illustrate a student's speaking proficiency in English. I made the evaluation of the subjects' speaking proficiency in English on the four aspects selected according to the IELTS system. The four aspects are — (i) Intelligibility, (ii) Vocabulary and Structure, (iii) General fluency and (iv) the Ability to communicate effectively.

Structured interview has been taken by predetermined questions. Speaking proficiency tests were given to the subjects of the study. The topics and items of the tests were chosen by me and the subjects were asked to talk on the topics for few minutes. Beside this, I made conversations with the subjects on an item selected by me.

As the main focus of this study is to find out the reasons behind the unequal standard of the speaking proficiency in English, I have collected information, which has illustrated the factors responsible for this problem. I collected data mainly through two methods- (i) observation method and (ii) direct interview method. Through the observation, I noticed the environment of the schools that whether the teachers, students and staff maintain the rules of the schools strictly or not, how far the schools maintain an English speaking environment, the quality of the teachers and staff, etc.

Then, I collected information by taking personal interviews of the teachers, the schools' authorities and the students. I obtained the information about the teachers' background, students' background, about the regular activities and the rules to maintain a standard in speaking English, about their extracurricular activities and whether there is any special programme to improve the speaking proficiency, etc. In this way I obtained the necessary data for my study.

## **Data presentation**

### **Difference in the speaking proficiency tests' scores**

The average score obtained in the speaking proficiency test given to the students of the English medium schools of Mohammadpur area is 19.4 whereas the average score obtained by the students of the English medium schools of Postogola-Sutrapur area is 9.4. The difference in the mean between the students of the English medium schools of the two areas is 10, which has been shown in the table no-5. It is clear from the data that there is a significant difference in the speaking proficiency in English between the students of the schools of the two areas. The students of the English medium schools of Postogola-Sutrapur area are much weaker in speaking English than the students of Mohammadpur area.

Now let us see the data regarding the socio-economic condition of the parents and the teachers of the two areas and the environment of the schools and other factors.

### **Mohammadpur Area**

#### **Teachers' background**

The teachers who have 'O' level background or have studied abroad get preference to join the schools. Generally, the teachers are master degree holders. They are good in speaking English.

The family backgrounds of the teachers are also considered by the school authorities. Except a few, all the teachers are female and their husbands are either high official or rich businessmen. Most of the teachers do not have any training on teaching.

**Students' backgrounds:**

The students have to go through an assessment test to get admitted to the schools. The parents of the students are educated and are either from upper middle class or rich class. Especially, their fathers are either high officials or big businessmen and most of their mothers also do good jobs. All the students started their schooling in English Medium Schools.

**Special programmes**

There is no special programme to improve the speaking skill, but the schools' authorities sometimes arrange workshop on teachers training.

**Extra-curricular activities:**

The students have to prepare speeches on some topics and read those aloud in the assembly. They have drama classes and they do debate also.

**Salary range of the teachers:**

The lowest salary of the teachers is Tk7,000 and the highest is Tk25,000 or above.

**Postogola-Sutrapur Area**

**Teachers' background**

The teachers are master degree holders and many of them have training on teaching. Very few of them are from English medium or 'O' level background. They don't have fluency in speaking English. Even the English teachers do not have the fluency. Very few teachers who are from 'O' level background are fluent in English. The teachers belong to the middle class and sometimes to the lower middle class. Here, 40 percent of the teachers are male, and, except one or two, their families live in villages. Most of the female teachers' husbands do small businesses.

**Students' backgrounds:**

Students don't have to take an assessment test to get admission. Except few, all the students started their schooling in English medium schools. The fathers of the students do small businesses. The mothers are housewives. They are not educated except a few.

**Special programmes:**

They don't have any special programmes to improve the speaking proficiency, but they have conversation classes as a regular activity.

**Extra-curricular activities:**

They have annual cultural programmes.

**Salary range:**

The lowest salary of the teachers is Tk2,500 and the highest is Tk8,000.

### **Schools' environment**

I've observed that the English Medium Schools of Mohammadpur area maintain their discipline and rules. They don't let anybody to talk in Bengali on the school campus. If any student breaks this rule, he/she doesn't get any place in the merit list. On the other hand, in the English Medium Schools of Postogola-Sutrapur area, the teachers as well as the students don't obey this rule of not speaking in Bengali on the school campus.

### **Other factors**

The good teachers don't stay long in the English Medium Schools in Postogola-Sutrapur area and it happens in case of the good students also. Another thing is that the students live near or at the areas adjacent to their schools.

## **DISCUSSION**

Now from the data obtained, it is clear that there are differences in the socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of the learners and teachers of the particular two areas. If we analyze the data, we find that these socio-economic factors have played a vital role in acquiring the speaking proficiency in English.

In the data, mainly two things strike us — one is the differences in the salary ranges of the teachers between the English medium schools of the two areas and another is the difference in the educational, socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of the parents as well as of the teachers of the schools of the two areas.

As the parents of the students of the English medium schools of Postogola-Sutrapur area are less educated, the students don't get a supportive environment at their home as well as in their neighbourhood (as the socio-cultural background of the inhabitants of this area is similar) to develop their speaking proficiency in English. Moreover, the school environment is also not supportive. Speaking in English at the school campus is not maintained strictly.

Besides, the extracurricular activities such as delivering speeches, performing drama or debating in English, etc., are not done in the English medium schools of this area.

The salary range of the teachers of the schools of Postogola-Sutrapur area is so poor in comparison with the salary range of the teachers of the English medium schools of Mohammadpur area that no good teachers would like to stay long in any school with this salary. Not only this, the teachers who work with this poor salary will suffer from a lack of motivation to work better for the students or for the school. So, it is obvious that no good teachers, who are from 'O' level background or are fluent and good in English, will serve the schools with this poor amount. Exactly this thing is happening in the English medium schools of Postogola-Sutrapur area.

Again, the teachers are not at all fluent in English except one or two teachers. We find in the study that the teachers of this area did their schooling in Bengali medium schools. So, if the teachers are

not good and fluent in English, how the students can learn to speak properly and fluently in English.

On the other hand, the students of the English medium schools of Mohammadpur area are fluent in English because of their family backgrounds, the academic background of their teachers, and the strict implementation of the rule of not allowing the students to speak in Bengali at their school premises. During the school hours, the students and teachers have to speak in English. The schools also hold extracurricular activities supportive to achieve the four skills of the foreign language.

The schools in Mohammadpur can hire teachers, who are good and fluent in English, because they pay them a good amount. So, it clearly indicates that the financial investment in running the schools in Mohammadpur area is bigger than that of the English medium schools in Postogola-Sutrapur area.

We know that the students of any school usually live in the areas, which are close to their school. Now, most of the students of the English medium schools of the two areas live in the areas, which are close to their own schools. So the students of the schools of the each area are influenced by the socio-cultural environment of their own areas and the reflection of this has occurred in the data obtained in this study.

**T ABLE- 5:** Descriptive Statistics and Significance of Difference in the Speaking Proficiency in English

Measure	Area	Mean
The Speaking proficiency Test	Mohammadpur	19.4
	Postogola-Sutrapur	9.4

## CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, it can be said that the topic of this study has been focused for the first time by this research work. In this study, we have seen that there is a significant difference in the speaking proficiency in English between the students of the English medium schools of the two different areas of Dhaka city. It has happened because of the socio-cultural and economic backgrounds of the students and teachers. Some other important factors such as the poor salary of the teachers, lack of motivation in the teachers and students, lack of teachers' training to improve the speaking proficiency, etc., have also found in case of the schools in Postogola-Sutrapur area. This research aims to benefit the students in acquiring the speaking proficiency in English by focusing the factors which influence acquiring the speaking skill. Besides, this study has suggested the probable solutions to improve the skill staying in the same socio-cultural and economical frame. Actually, it is not within our range to change the family background of the students and teachers or socio-

cultural and economical background of an area. So we have to find out the measures which will enable the students to improve their speaking proficiency in English. So we can hope that this study will be beneficial in the field of English language teaching and learning.

### Recommendations

From the obtained data and discussion, the following measures can be taken by the schools' authorities to improve the speaking proficiency in English of the students of the English medium schools of Postogola- Sutrapur area:

1. The authorities of the English medium schools of this area should increase their investment to improve the quality of the teachers. The salary should be good enough to motivate the teachers to stay in the schools and work better.
2. Short training on the development of the speaking skill in English can be provided to the teachers.
3. They should try to appoint the teachers, who are fluent in English.
4. The rule of not speaking in Bengali at the school campus should be followed strictly.
5. The extracurricular activities supportive to improve the speaking proficiency, such as, giving speeches on any topic, debating, performing drama, role playing, etc., should be held.
6. A regular class on speaking in English may can be given once or twice a week. It can be started from Standard- I.

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### APPENDIX-A

Questions asked in the interviews of the teachers and the school authorities:

1. What are the regular practices in your school for the improvement of the speaking proficiency in English?
2. Is there any special programme or activity to improve the speaking proficiency in English?
3. What is the minimum qualification of the teachers in your school?
4. Is there any factor other than the qualifications which is considered in teachers' recruitment?
5. What is the salary range of the teachers in this school?

6. Do you give any admission test to the students?

7. Do you consider any other factor besides the result of the admission test to admit a student in your school?

Questions asked to the students

1. What does your father do?
2. What does your mother do?
3. Do you speak English outside the school- at your home or to your neighbours?
4. Had you started your education with English medium schools?

## **APPENDIX-B**

Items or questions given in the speaking proficiency tests to the students of this study:  
Standard-V

1. Introduce your peer to us and tell something about him/her.
2. Describe your 'Daily Activities.
3. Converse with me about yourself and your family.

Standard-VII

1. Which profession do you like best and why?
2. What do you think about watching television, especially, satellite channels?
3. Converse with me about your likings, disliking and family life.