

Teaching English Language to the Mixed-ability Classes at the HSC Level in Bangladesh: Challenges and Probable Solutions

Mohammad Khalilur Rahman¹

Abstract

From the experience of teaching English for a quite long time, the researcher felt the urge to search for probable solutions to the challenges in teaching English language to the mixed-ability classes at the HSC level in Bangladesh. The researcher had interaction with other practicing English teachers who indicated that the challenges and probable solutions in teaching English language to the mixed-ability classes need research encouraged him for the study. The objectives of the study are (i) to investigate the challenges the English teachers face in the mixed-ability classes at the HSC level in Bangladesh and (ii) to identify the probable solutions to overcome the challenges in the pertinent classes. The study has been conducted from January to August 2018. English teachers at the HSC level in Bangladesh are the population of the study and the sample includes 50 teachers. The secondary sources have been used for collecting information on the latest theoretical development in this field. Questionnaire survey and interview with teachers have been the methods of collecting primary data. The study has revealed that the strategies mentioned in the questionnaire need to be used to overcome the challenges. Moreover, necessity for ability grouping, more resources and motivation for the students, clear instructions and the best possible classroom environment has been felt by the teachers. Recommendations have been made for providing teachers' training and further studies.

Key Words: *Mixed-ability Classes, HSC Level, Challenges, Probable Solutions*

1. Lecturer in English, Darul Islam Fazil Degree Madrashah, Savar, Dhaka & PhD Researcher, Bangladesh University of Professionals +8801715 838421, khalil8384@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

In every profession there are some challenges. Mixed-ability class is one of the vital challenges the English teachers face every day. Mixed ability classes differ in the level of learners' abilities in the receptive and productive skills, fluency and accuracy work, grammatical knowledge, size of vocabulary, command of pronunciation and so on (Valentic, 2005, p.74). Mixed ability classes vary in their levels of competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing (Mattews-Aydinli & Horne 2006). Bremner (2008) pointed out that the mixed-ability classes have students with different abilities, learning styles and preferences. Thus, mixed-ability classes are considered as a universal phenomenon. Hedge (2000) noted that teaching a classroom of mixed-ability is a vital and genuine issue that instructors experience daily. He added that the mixed-ability problem has demanded serious attention from experts in the educational field. The college authorities take admission test to minimize the problem; but in reality it has been proved impossible. The objectives of the study are (i) to identify the challenges in the mixed-ability classes at the HSC level in Bangladesh and (ii) to investigate the strategies to handle the challenges in the pertinent classes. The study has two research questions as follow:

- a) What challenges do the HSC level English teachers face in the mixed-ability classes in Bangladesh?
- b) What strategies do the HSC level English teachers use to overcome the challenges in Bangladesh?

As a practicing teacher of English, for a quite long time, the researcher has felt that the English teachers and the students at the HSC level are suffering in teaching-learning scenario. Interaction with other practicing teachers on this issue has encouraged the researcher for the study. The study deals with an important issue of the challenges in teaching English to the mixed-ability classes which deserves continuous study and survey for adapting with the strategies to overcome the challenges and to include the latest development on the probable solutions to the challenges. Today it has taken the place of a considerable hindrance in pursuing the objectives of English language studies to achieve English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Most of the English teachers are confused regarding the challenges and probable solutions in teaching English language to the mixed-ability classes. The previous studies show that no study has been conducted on the same topic. So, there have some research gaps in this area to identify the challenges and probable solutions in teaching English at this level.

The findings of the study are beneficial for the HSC level teachers and students in teaching-learning English. The study has revealed that strategies mentioned in the questionnaire need to be used to overcome the challenges in teaching the mixed-ability classes. Moreover,

necessity for ability grouping, more resources and motivation for the students, clear instructions and best possible classroom environment has been felt by the teachers. Recommendations have been made for providing adequate teaching materials and teachers' training. There are some limitations in conducting the study as some teachers might not provide real information since they have been unprepared to face various items of the extensive questionnaire while answering the questions. In this study introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis, findings and discussion, recommendation and conclusion have been organized consecutively.

2. Literature Review

The researcher has studied the previous studies to find out research gaps, regarding the challenges in the mixed-ability classes and the strategies used to overcome the challenges, and to have an overview in this area. At first, he has discussed the previous studies on the challenges. Later on, the previous studies on the strategies used to overcome the challenges have been reviewed and later on research gap has been discussed.

2.1. Challenges in the Mixed-ability Classes

Many factors may differ from one student to another such as their attitude, motivation and self-discipline (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). This makes it difficult for the teachers to effectively plan for their lessons to ensure that all students reap the required benefits from the lesson (Ansari, 2103). Most institutions address this problem by dividing the classes according to their ages. But these classes are still multileveled when individual abilities are considered. Studies have shown that random grouping does not incorporate the level of ability and skills of individual students. This results in various challenges to the teachers who try to give equal opportunities to all the students in the class (Boaler, 2008).

The trainee teachers of English do not feel very confident in confronting a group of pupils who have different language learning ability, language knowledge, cultural background, learning style, attitude towards language, mother tongue, intelligence, world knowledge, learning experience, knowledge of other languages, age, gender, personality, confidence, motivation, interests, and/or educational level (Ur, 1996, p.304).

The student and teachers are unaware of the importance of teaching skills and techniques and unable to provide effective student-centered lessons, so they often do not succeed in involving the whole class (Thomas, D., Dimtirova, D., Geshev, G. and S. Tashevskas eds., 2002, p. 83). One suggested way of solving the problem is to establish a requirement for trainees to try out two or three of the approaches in this way. "In practice what is needed most is a chance of emphasis in the classroom to create the context where all learners feel valuable and have the space and confidence to try." (Rose, 1999, p. 4).

Language teachers feel confused when some learners acquire features of the language fast while other learners in the same class show little or no improvement. Learners' aptitude and motivation towards learning a new language are the main factors that affect their performance in language classes (Ellis, 1994).

There are both positive and negative sides in grouping students. One positive side is that the lesson can be easier to plan and manage in some ways. On the other hand, to separate the slow learners can do harm to their social and emotional difficulties being placed in a "slow class" they can think of themselves as different, inferior or other negative terms (Kelly, 1974). According to Svard (2006), the best way is ability grouping. The most important factors were a good atmosphere, clear instructions, structure, and setting routines.

Teachers are also to face with the shortage of training programs and strategies to prepare them for such situations. Most of the instructors lack the professional development, planning time, or the capacity to consistently implement differentiation (Loiacono & Allen, 2008). It is the responsibility of the teacher to control the students and to deliver the lesson effectively. It becomes a tedious process and difficult to administer their lesson plans (Northcote, 2006).

The students with a high-ability of understanding get bored as the instructor tries to make further explanations to the students with moderate to low levels of knowledge absorbing capabilities. The most challenging part of English language teaching in a mixed-ability class is the fact that the teachers are expected to guide students at their individual pace, regardless of the proficiency differences. Failure by the teacher to address the needs of every student often makes the active students maintain their active state whilst their more passive counterparts remain passive with no positive development (Hedge, 2000).

There is always a huge disconnection between these two types of students and thus, no progress in learning is recorded. This means that the teacher should employ different teaching methods and techniques. The teachers turn to employ average teaching methods in a healthy balance. This leaves the slow learners struggling while the academically advanced students get lost since the learning process effectively neglects their needs (Winebrenner, 2001). Teaching gifted learners in a diverse-classroom has revealed success (Tyler, 2006). The students have their own way of learning, and the weaker ones probably have more difficulties working in a noisy atmosphere (Kelly, 1974).

A mixed-ability class can seem uncooperative, the students can get bored easily and this can abuse commotion in the classroom. Planning the lesson and making work-material can take too much time for the teacher and the planned material is often too easy or too difficult for the students. This may make the teacher feel unable to cope with the class (Hess, 2001).

Ability grouping is a dangerous practice because teachers who are to teach the low ability groups are bound to be influenced by this knowledge, which may send the children on an ever

downward spiral of low achievement and low expectations (Dörnyei, 2001, p.35). It is important to set certain rules with the students about how to behave with a good learning situation. A teacher should discuss proper rules for a good learning situation with the students (Bowman, 1992).

The students vary in their attitudes, motivation and self-discipline. Consequently, teachers face some complications in designing proper lessons (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Both Brown (2002) and Supple (1990) stress the importance of helping the students to learn different learning strategies. It can be very helpful to allow the students to create their own study guides for a test and so on.

However, in real teaching contexts, still little attention has been paid to prepare and train teachers. They are not given many guidelines to help them prepare for suitable adaptation according to students' needs. It is very common for most teachers to deal with the situation through 'teaching the average', leaving slow learners struggling and failing to involve advanced students at the same time (Perera, 2010).

2.2. Strategies to Overcome the Challenges

Hess (2001) stresses that teaching ultimately depends on the willingness of the student to learn, unless the learner takes some responsibility in the shape of active cooperation and effort, there will be no learning in spite of the efforts of excellent teachers (Hess, 2001, p 159). It can be very useful for the weaker students to be provided with self-assess material, so that the student can follow his/her progress and evaluate how it goes (Shank, 1995).

One of the most important ways to deal with mixed-ability classes is to always give clear information and instructions and to present it in easy and manageable ways. This contributes to making the students feel it is more meaningful and interesting (Kelly, 1974). When explaining something to the students it is very useful to show concrete examples and illustrations. Using several methods to inform the students reinforces their understanding. After they have been given clear instructions it is advisable to give them time to think and discuss with their workmate and then ask questions (Dörnyei, 2001). It is important to plan bigger tasks in manageable steps because if the task is not clearly presented to the students, and they are uncertain about how to go on with the task, it can create a problematic situation. Some of the students may feel it is too hard for them, and some may even give up (Baker, 2000).

The students' own interests and experiences, their own ideas and emotions should be considered when planning lessons. Teachers' insistence on attending to students' experiences, interests, and prior knowledge was once thought to result from a disregard for scientific methods. Now, however, these considerations are supported by cognitive research (Leiding, 2002, p 37-38).

To use activities that are student-centered is one of the solutions to dealing with mixed-ability teaching, according to Berry and Williams (1992). The content needs to be relevant for the students, and it needs to be linked to the tasks. This can be done by letting them express their own ideas and describe their own experiences. This gives meaning to the task because it concerns the students more directly (Tomlinson, 1999). The current situation of teacher training in certain subjects including foreign language suggests that future teachers will acquire an “in depth mastering of basic knowledge in certain research areas as well as of teaching methods so that pupils can also acquire this knowledge” (National Report, Bulgaria, 2005, p. 217).

A study was conducted in Japan among some EFL teachers about mixed-ability classes. Some teachers believed that lower achievers might be motivated to catch up to their higher level classmates. Both higher and lower achievers would benefit by working together (Millan & Joyce, 2011). A double case study was done in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The researcher tried to prove the importance of collaborative learning and peer-tutoring. Then the learning environment would be cooperative rather than competitive. Students would eagerly help each other if they have the qualified teacher who can guide them and applies the appropriate strategies (Hernandez, 2012).

Butterworth (2010) found that teachers need to be trained on how to deal with mixed-ability students, and to take care of gifted students. A similar study, conducted in the USA, found that teachers need to be well-prepared during their study and also need an in-service program to develop their abilities to deal with students' differences (Kantor, 2011). Clear organization is vital in order to create a good atmosphere. A teacher should not just explain what they are learning in each lesson but also why it is important. The teacher should begin each lesson by giving clear instructions to the whole class and end by addressing the whole class to get routines, both daily and weekly. These routines create a sense of stability and structure which is helpful to many weaker students (Bowman, 1992).

For a teacher, assessment is very important, not just after each unit but on a day to day level. This is important because it helps to see how the lesson went and how it can be improved next time by better instructions, group work etc. (Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers should also be involved in the training programs and equipped with the ideal leadership skills. They should be equipped with the relevant knowledge to better their understanding of the different abilities and needs of their students (Boaler, 2008). Tomlinson (2001) suggests that teachers only need to differentiate instructions in diverse-classrooms to strike a healthy balance and enhance the learning process.

A teacher would be more likely to differentiate instruction for their advanced students (Caldwell, 2012). Ireson & Hallam (2001) suggest that instructors need to recognize a class is

of mixed-ability. Consequently, instructors in regular classrooms are always under intense pressure to address the needs of their diverse learners (Mayer, 2008).

The previous studies have been reviewed by the researcher and some knowledge gaps have been found. The researcher has reviewed the previous studies related to the topic "Teaching English Language to the Mixed-ability Classes at the HSC Level in Bangladesh: Challenges and Probable Solutions" in public and private universities in Bangladesh and data available in the internet sources and it shows that no study has been conducted on the same topic and there have been some research gaps in this area. Then the researcher has selected the topic to investigate the challenges the teachers face in teaching English to the mixed-ability classes at the HSC level in Bangladesh, to identify the probable solutions to the pertinent challenges by an empirical study and following the latest theoretical development in this field. The researcher is substantially benefited reviewing the previous studies getting an insight into it.

3. Methodology

To collect data for the study, the researcher has followed a mix method paradigm. Research design, sample, instruments and data collection procedure of the study are described below.

Research Design: The study has been conducted through an extensive questionnaire survey and interview with HSC level English teachers in Bangladesh.

Sample: Purposive sampling method has been followed. The higher secondary level English teachers have been the population and 50 teachers of twenty five colleges of Dhaka district in Bangladesh have been the respondents of the study.

Instruments: The teacher questionnaire and interview schedule have been the instruments of the study. The researcher has reviewed the previous studies related to this area and edited the teacher questionnaire and interview question used in the previous studies. In the interview schedule, there have been eight questions.

Data Collection Procedure: The researcher has maintained formality with the principals of the twenty five colleges and he has collected data from the English teachers of the colleges. After an introductory talk with the teachers, the researcher has handed the questionnaires over to the English teachers. The teachers normally have taken 30-35 minutes to answer the questions in the questionnaire. The researcher has never influenced the teachers in answering the questions. Afterwards, he has taken the questionnaire in return from the teachers. The researcher has interviewed the same teachers later on.

4. Data Analysis

The researcher has collected data is subject to analysis. At first the researcher has analyzed and presented the data of questionnaire survey using IBM SPSS 20 and then he has presented the data of interview.

4.1. Data from the Questionnaire Survey

The researcher has presented the statements of the questionnaire with fifty teachers' responses. The participants have been asked to respond to the statements using a Likert-type five point scale ranging from never to always. For the purpose of interpretation of data, the values have been divided as follow:

Always	Very Often	Often	Seldom	Never
5	4	3	2	1

Section I of the Questionnaire: Here the researcher has recorded teachers' personal information including name, designation, experience, educational qualification, training if any and name as well as address of the colleges.

Section II of the Questionnaire: In this section, the researcher has collected data of the four types of challenges.

Question-1: How often do you face the following challenges (Table-I, II, III and IV)?

Table-I: Teaching-learning Challenges

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Teaching large course book does not help me follow individual students.	3.6400	.48487
2. Many students are unable to communicate using English especially low achievers.	3.1000	.67763
3. There is a wide gap among students' levels in different skills.	3.6600	.51942
4. The course books' activities do not suit the different levels of the students.	4.1800	.82536
5. It is difficult to plan a balanced lesson that fits all students with their different abilities.	4.2200	.93219
6. I cannot satisfy the needs of all students.	3.4200	.60911

The table shows that the total number of statement is six and the average mean score is 3.70.

Table-II: Challenges in Motivation

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Lack of confidence of some students leads them not to communicate in class.	3.4000	.78246
2. Some students quickly lose interest as they have very low language ability.	3.6000	.57143
3. Simplifying the lesson for low ability students decreases good students' interest.	3.4600	.50346
4. There is a wide gap among students' levels in different skills.	3.5200	.50467
5. There is a lack of motivation among some students in the class.	3.5200	.50467
6. Low-level students feel that they are treated unequally in mixed ability classes.	3.4800	.73512
7. High-level students feel they are treated unequally in mixed ability classes.	3.6600	.84781
8. It is difficult to ensure that all students are challenged and interested.	3.4600	1.28110

The table shows that the total number of statement is eight and the average mean score is 3.51.

Table-III: Challenges in Teaching Materials

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. It is difficult to design different activities for different levels to achieve the same goal.	3.5000	.83910
2. Fixed lesson plans prevent us from adapting various activities.	3.5600	.95105
3. The teacher's book does not support me with effective strategies to deal with mixed ability classes.	3.4200	.78480
4. Course books are designed solely for average learners neglecting high and low achievers.	3.2600	.80331
5. It is difficult to find appropriate teaching resources for different levels.	3.3400	.62629
6. It is difficult for me to design or adapt different materials regularly.	3.5600	.92934

The table shows that the total number of statement is six and the average mean score is 3.44.

Table-IV: Challenges in Classroom Management

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. It is difficult to pay equal attention to each student in the class.	3.6400	.72168
2. It is a demanding task for me to deal with the students' differences in a mixed ability class.	3.3600	.77618
3. Lack of involvement leads some students to cause problems in the class.	3.6200	.63535
4. It is difficult to devote equal time to all students.	3.3600	.98478
5. I use L1 to manage the class and clarify instructions.	3.8400	.88893
6. Bright students are likely to be neglected or held back in mixed ability classes.	3.7800	.78999
7. It is difficult to organize appropriate grouping in the class.	3.6800	1.16829

The above table shows that the total number of statement is seven and the average mean score is 3.61.

The following chart-I has summarized the data of the above four tables.

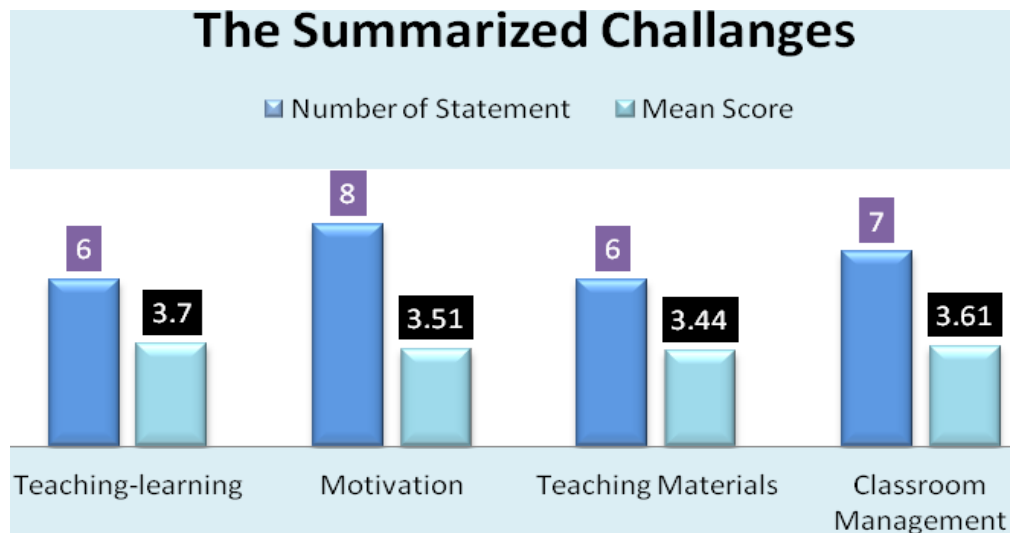


Chart-I

Section-III of the Questionnaire: In this section, the following six tables show the six types of data on using the strategies to overcome the challenges.

Question-2: How often do you use the following strategies (Table-V,VI,VII,VIII, IX and X)?

Table-V: Measures to Overcome the Teaching-learning Challenges

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Explaining the purpose of homework for the students.	3.4400	.86094
2. Regular class observation among teachers.	3.5200	.90891
3. Writing the aims of the lesson on the board regularly.	3.7600	1.09842
4. Planning to observe 3 or 4 students every day while walking around the class.	3.5800	1.08965
5. Applying creative tasks that allow students to work at their levels (story, opinion and diary).	2.4000	.92582
6. Designing vocabulary cards to improve reading ability.	2.1800	.87342
7. Summarizing the lesson with the students.	2.4800	.90891
8. Giving extra lessons for some students.	2.6000	1.24540
9. Exchanging ideas with other teachers.	2.6200	.87808
10. Teaching students the importance of note taking.	2.4000	1.01015
11. Providing students with information gap activities.	2.3200	.91339
12. Using different levels of stories and folktales.	2.5200	.99468
13. Encouraging students to reconstruct stories.	2.5200	.99468
14. Mixing compulsory with optional tasks.	2.7200	1.01096
15. Applying multi-level dictation (paper, a medium level cloze and a cloze with only a few blanks).	2.5200	1.19932
16. Having drama and sketch (miming, role play, etc.) in class to have a stress-free environment.	2.2400	1.27071
17. Providing a menu of work for the students and they choose.	2.3000	.70711
18. Involving low-level students in English club activities.	2.2600	1.13946

The table shows that the total number of statement is eighteen and the average mean score is 2.69.

Table-VI: Measures to Overcome the Challenges in Motivation and Interest

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Students design their own glossaries to write new words and definitions.	2.3400	1.30321
2. Students interview each other to complete questionnaires or to talk about themselves.	2.6600	.93917
3. Working on interesting topics (hobbies ,home, friends, food, etc.)	2.9200	.98644
4. Using Internet and computers during classes to get students' interest.	2.2600	.92162
5. Taking students to the Learning Resource Centre to choose what they want to read.	2.2200	.78999
6. Encouraging students to express their expectations about the new units.	1.9800	.84491
7. Students work together to write their own stories.	2.0400	.75485
8. Encouraging students to put suggestions or complaints about the lessons in a box in their classroom.	2.5200	1.03490
9. Students discuss together how they can accomplish their goals.	2.7400	.96489
10. Encouraging students to set goals for themselves.	2.3800	.72534

The table shows that the total number of statement is ten and the average mean score is 2.41.

Table-VII: Measures to Overcome the Challenges with Teaching Materials

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Using simplified materials that are not demanding for low-level students.	2.5200	.93110
2. Using a bank of materials at the institution with activities of different levels.	2.4400	.95105
3. Preparing handouts before the beginning of the semester.	2.3600	.98478
4. Adapting open-ended tasks (summary, analysis and express opinions).	2.8000	.92582
5. Applying Jigsaw activities (each student is doing a part).	2.5400	.76158
6. Using more communicative activities like (games, puzzles, etc.)	2.3600	.72168
7. Using more authentic materials beside the course book.	2.5400	.88548

The table shows that the total number of statement is seven and the average mean score is 2.51.

Table-VIII: Measures to Overcome the Challenges in Classroom Management

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Calling students by their names to make them feel respected and to pay attention.	1.6800	.86756
2. Involving high-level students in class management to save teacher's time.	2.2800	.88156
3. Varying voice to make the meaning clear and get the students' attention.	2.3600	.92051
4. Giving time to the students to copy important information from the board.	2.5000	.86307
5. Working closely with low-level students to motivate them.	2.4000	.78246
6. Giving extra activities to the group or the students who finish earlier.	2.4200	.85928
7. Varying the pace and level of instructions.	2.2800	.72955
8. Using art and images to attract students' attention.	2.3000	.70711
9. Students sit in groups forming different shapes.	2.4000	.80812
10. Changing pairs from time to time.	2.3800	.69664
11. Personalizing tasks (students talk about themselves and their experiences).	2.4600	.76158
12. Assigning mixed-ability group project (students get different roles while working on the project).	2.4800	.81416
13. Using in-class peer-tutoring.	2.4400	.73290

The table shows that the total number of statement is thirteen and the average mean score is 2.34.

Table-IX: Need Analysis as the Way to Facilitate the Mixed-ability Classes

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Continuous reflection and assessment on students' performance.	2.3400	1.04217
2. Using a checklist as progress indicators (to show students' performance and reflect their needs).	2.5600	.95105
3. Applying students' journals, especially for bright students.	2.5000	1.11117
4. Organizing meetings with students to discuss their goals and needs with the teachers.	3.5600	.86094
5. Tape recorded or video recorded class interaction.	3.9600	.40204
6) Using questionnaires to understand students' needs and levels.	2.9200	.48823

The table shows that the total number of statement is six and the average mean score is 2.97.

Table-X: Evaluation as the Way to Facilitate the Mixed-ability Classes

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Giving regular progress tests.	3.7800	.64807
2. Applying peer assessment technique to exchange experience and cooperate together.	3.7400	.75078
3. Providing immediate, relevant, and explicit feedback.	2.9200	.44447
4. Assessing students' portfolios regularly.	3.6200	.85452
5. Contacting parents to discuss their children's levels.	3.8800	.38545
6. Using formative assessment to evaluate students' progress.	3.8400	.50950
7. Practicing self- assessment technique with students.	3.7000	.70711

The above table shows that the total number of statement is seven and the average mean score is 3.64. The researcher has summarized the data on the used strategies mentioned in the above six tables through the following chart-II.

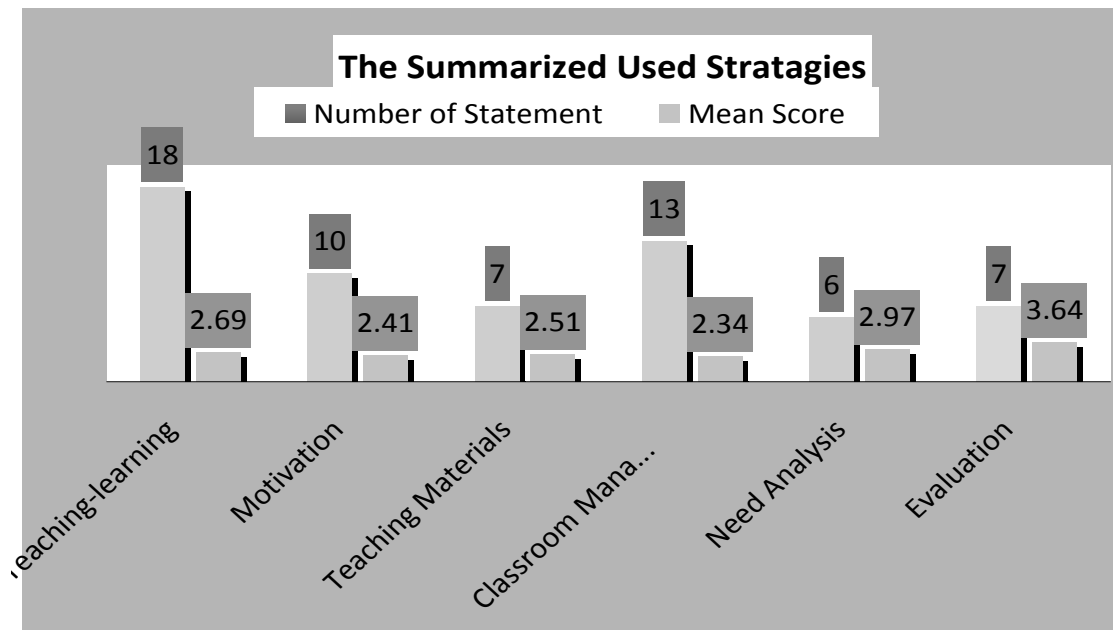


Chart-II

4.2. Responses from the Interview

For the interview, fifty teachers have answered the eight questions. Here all the answers have been compiled as follow.

Question-1: How long have you been an English teacher?

The English teachers answered that, out of fifty, thirty four teachers are experienced more than ten years and other sixteen of them are experienced less than ten years in teaching English at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

Question-2: Do you think that the students in English classes are at many different ability levels? Is it a problem? Why/Why not?

The teachers replied in the affirmative and said that it is a great problem for the teachers. Some students make progress fast while others fall behind. All teachers added that the differences are due to the students' different backgrounds.

Question-3: Do you think dividing the English classes into ability groups would be a good way to deal with the problem? Why/Why not?

All teachers were positive towards ability grouping and they all thought it improves the situation for both the weaker students and for the faster ones. From a teaching aspect there is no better and more effective solution. But, it cannot be accepted for everyday classes. All teachers said that in a regular class it is impossible to help everyone.

Question-4: Do you think that the English teachers can improve the learning of the weaker students? How do you approach the weaker students? Do you help them in a specific way?

The teachers believe that they can improve the learning of the weaker students. The weaker students are placed in group and they receive different exercises. The students need to know exactly what is expected from them. The teacher needs to go slowly and have patience with the students and let them take their time. All teachers should discover what level the student is at and what system he/she would like. The students need to know exactly what they are going to do and how to do. The teachers should develop a personal relationship with the students, divide bigger parts into smaller easier steps and specially help the weaker ones.

Question-5: How does an English teacher motivate the weaker students?

The teachers have answered that they need to show their interest in what they teach. The teachers make the students understand what English is useful for and try to make them formulate their own goals. It is easy to motivate someone if the motivation comes first from the student. They believe that making the lessons more varied and appealing to their interests would motivate the students.

Question-6: What is important to make the best possible classroom environment for the weaker students?

All teachers believe that the teacher needs to use very clear instructions, write on the board, repeat, walk around and make sure that they know what to do. The teachers must be very well prepared, know exactly what she/he is going to do, always bring extra materials and encourage everyone. It is important to give positive feedback, comment on both content and language, give them advice on what they need to practice more and correct the mistakes. It is important to enhance students' self-confidence and make sure that they are not afraid to ask questions. The teachers need to give them time and offer extra help.

Question-7: Do you talk to your students about how they are doing in English and what they need to improve it?

The teachers said that they usually do so at least once in each course. If the students have specific problem, they should talk with him/her earlier and may even contract a special teacher. The teachers said that they try boosting their self confidence and telling them not to compare themselves with others in the class. All teachers advice the students on how to improve English. They discuss what is hard for them and how they can help them. The students usually need to improve the grammatical knowledge of English and so they seek special class.

Question-8: What kind of special help in teaching English does your College offer? At what point do you offer this to the students?

All teachers told that their colleges offer the help of a special class in English. Every student participates a test in English, and based on their results, some students get the chance to go to a special class in addition to the regular English classes. The teachers believe that they need more resources as the number of students needing extra help is increasing.

5. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the empirical study are subject to discussion. At first, the researcher has discussed the findings from the questionnaire survey and then he has discussed the findings from the interview. Finally, he has summarized the overall findings.

5.1 Findings from the Questionnaire Survey

There are two types of findings from the questionnaire survey as findings on the challenges and findings on the measures to overcome the challenges.

5.1.1. Findings on Facing the Challenges

Through the following chart, the researcher has presented the findings on the challenges in the mixed-ability classes according to the first four tables of the questionnaire survey.

Mean Score on Facing the Challenges

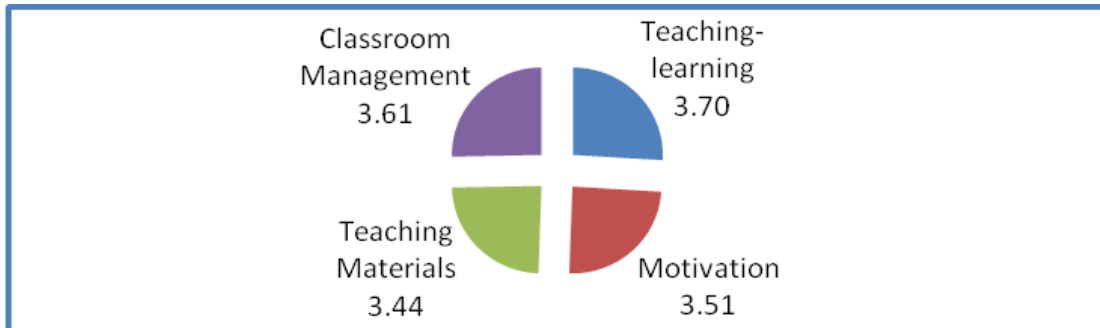


Chart-III

The chart shows that the teachers face the challenges in teaching English to the mixed-ability classes are presented in average mean scores. So, it proves that the teachers very often face all four types of challenges.

5.1.2. Findings on Using the Strategies

The researcher has presented the findings in average mean scores of the responses on the used strategies to overcome the challenges in teaching English in the mixed-ability classes through the following chart-IV.

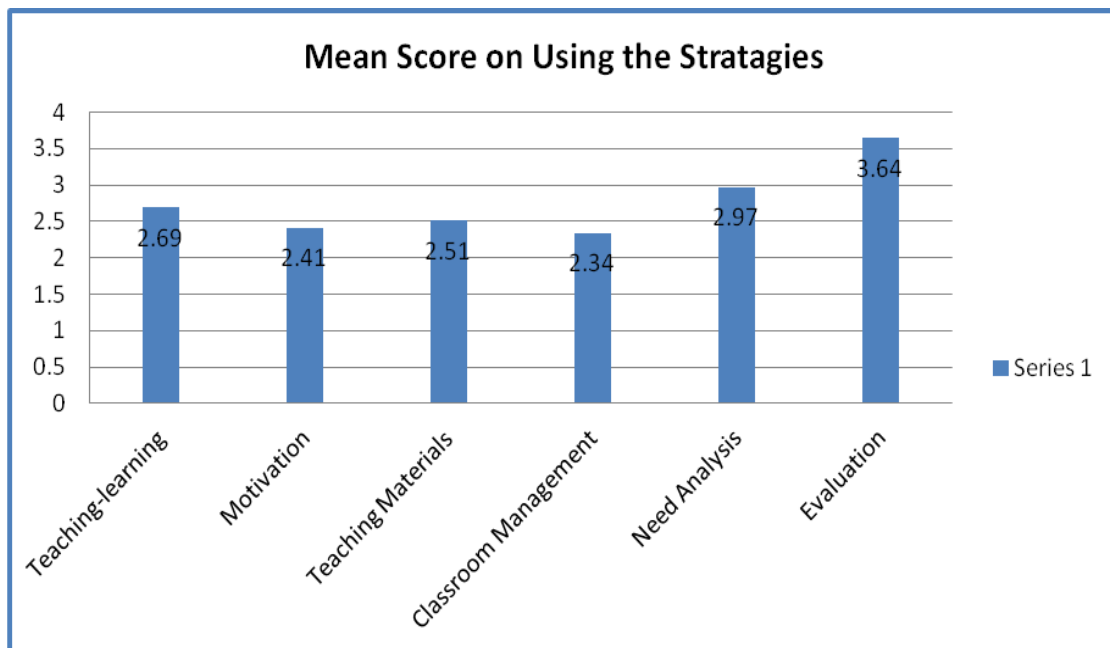


Chart-IV

The chart shows that the average mean scores of teaching-learning, motivation, teaching materials and classroom management are less than 3 and it proves that the teachers rarely use the strategies mentioned under these four headings. The teachers often use the strategies mentioned under 'Need Analysis' and 'Evaluation', as the mean scores of these two types of strategies are early 3 and above 3.

5.1.3. The Summarized Findings from the Questionnaire Survey

Through the following chart, the researcher has curtailed the overall summary of the findings from the questionnaire survey.

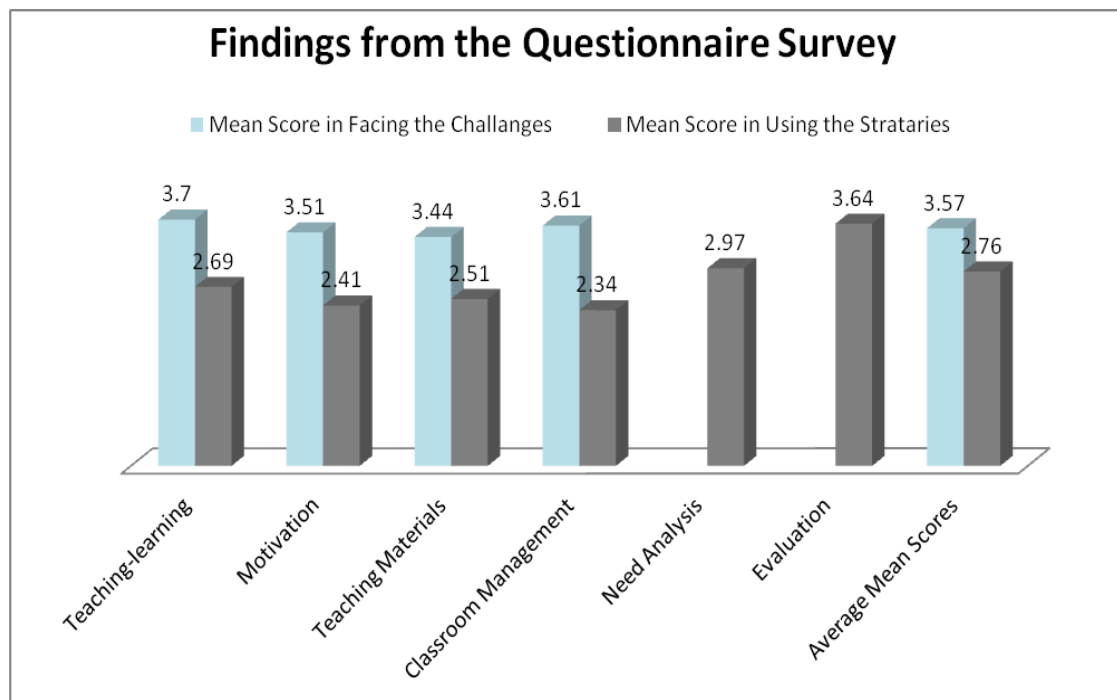


Chart-V

The chart shows that the average mean scores in facing the challenges is 3.57 but the average mean scores in using the strategies to handle the challenges is 2.76. So, it proves that the teachers often face all these types of challenges while they rarely use the strategies to overcome the challenges.

5.2. The Summarized Findings from the Interview

The findings from the interview show that nearly half of the twenty teachers are more than, and others are less than, ten years experienced in teaching English who responded that the classes are of mixed-ability and it is a colossal problem. Ability grouping, more resources for

the students, students' understanding of teachers' expectations, teachers' patience, teaching slowly, clear instructions, friendly teacher, dividing bigger parts into easier steps and specially helping the weaker students are the responses from the teachers. The teachers need to motivate the weaker students creating interest in teaching English, indicating its importance, setting students' aim in life, sharing ideas on how the teachers can help students develop their learning and emphasizing students to be self-motivated. The teachers want to see the best possible classroom environment using the white board and overhead projector, repeating what is written, walking around the students, giving feedback, correcting their mistakes very friendly and practicing more in addition to correcting the mistakes, enhancing self-confidence and giving them time and extra help. The teachers should talk with students about their improvements in learning English. Finally, the colleges offer extra class in teaching English and the teachers conduct these classes.

Thus, the study shows that the teachers often face types of challenges while they rarely use the mentioned strategies to overcome the challenges. Likewise, according to the teachers, there are some considerable requirements mentioned in the above paragraph.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations for providing adequate teaching-learning materials and teachers' training have been made. Some of the recommendations are made separately. Decision makers are recommended to improve the English teachers' guide for the betterment of enhancing English teaching scenario at this level. The heads of the institutions are recommended to guide the English teachers giving clear instructions in the classes. English teachers' training and workshop should also be arranged to make them familiar with various methods of conducting the mixed-ability classes.

The English language teachers are recommended to create the best possible classroom environment for the students being shifted from a single teaching method to various methods. They need to be familiar with the students' personal life as well as interests and should consider the individual differences of the students' learning attitudes in the mixed-ability classes. Website visiting is beneficial and helpful for the teachers to be familiar with the teaching techniques. Further studies in a comprehensive scale in this area are recommended to get a deeper understanding of the issue.

7. Conclusion

The study has answered the research questions and fulfilled the objectives mentioned in the introduction. The present teaching-learning culture does not prove to be much effective in contributing most of the students develop their English language competence due to the challenges in the mixed-ability classes. Uninteresting and one-way method of teaching English in the mixed-ability classes hamper the teaching practices. So, the mentioned

strategies should always be used to overcome the challenges. Similarly, the teachers' views need to be taken into positive consideration to enhance English teaching-learning situation in the mixed-ability classes at the HSC level in Bangladesh.

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