



RESEARCH ARTICLE

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CLIL AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Being one of the signatories of the United Nations (2015) *Sustainable Development Goals*, Bangladesh is committed to achieving the goals which is also the demand of time in this 21st century. To attain sustainability for a habitable future, teaching sustainability is a must that is possible to achieve in the English language classroom. The research paper aims to find teachers' perceptions of ensuring teaching sustainability in the English language classroom at the primary level of education in Bangladesh. It analyses the contents of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) approved English textbook of Class-V to see how many of them align with the criteria of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). It also tries to identify the pedagogy of English language teaching at the primary level from the teachers' perspectives so that the researchers can also comprehend their perceptions of students' current learning outcomes. The study grounded on the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach is mixed method research that is descriptive in type. Content analysis, surveys, and interviews of teachers are done to collect the data. The research involves 4 primary school teachers in Bangladesh to understand their perception of teaching sustainability and students' sustainability awareness along with their language skills. In this research, the purposive sampling of non-probability sampling has been used. The study finds teachers' positive approach to ensuring teaching sustainability following the existing textbook. However, their mixed perception is uncovered about integrating CLIL for building an advantageous situation for both teachers and students to result in order to achieve sustainable goals and prepare students better for the future.

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Introduction:-

Teaching Sustainability is amalgamating environmental and sustainable issues in the classroom. In order to gain sustainability, education or knowledge about it is needed first. English being the Lingua Franca is compulsorily taught in all levels of education in Bangladesh. Learning English Language would be intriguing to students if the focus is shifted from language learning to content. Incorporating Sustainable content in the English Language Classroom thus would be a win-win situation for both language learning and sustainable teaching. As the

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government will teach students sustainability to reach sustainable goals, it is to be seen how many contents of the English Class-V textbook are sustainable and what is the teachers' perception regarding ensuring teaching sustainability at the primary level as early exposure will lead to better learning.

2. Background of the Study

For the urgency of the deadening situation, the United Nations declared 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030(UN, 2015). As a member of the United Nations and signatory of SDGs, Bangladesh is obligated to achieve these goals(Amin and Greenwood, 2018). Transformative change is not possible without awareness of these sustainable goals and sustainable issues.

Education is the key to shaping people's behaviour and attitude. Thus, teaching sustainability can only lift humanity from drowning in the sea of destructive climate change and inhabitable environment and bring changes in people to save the world for us and future generations. Teaching sustainability or teaching about sustainable content can be done in different ways, as mentioned, as a separate subject or by integrating sustainable content in multiple disciplines. As Bangladesh is committed to SDGs, as a means of application, sustainable contents are incorporated in different subjects' textbooks.

The reason for attempting to ensure teaching sustainability in English language classrooms is that English is a name of trauma to most of the students. Despite studying English compulsorily for twelve years or more, students fail to achieve language and communicative competency in English. Learning is hindered or affected greatly by students' anxiety and nervousness about learning a non-native language. If enough sustainable content can be found in English textbooks, and they can be taught through Content and Language Integrative Learning (CLIL) where the focus will be shifted to the content instead of language learning, then language learning will occur in a better way.

3. Statement of the Problem

As climate change is becoming more devastating day by day, the United Nations (UN) called for sustainable development(United Nations, 2015). For attaining sustainability for a liveable future, teaching sustainability is a must. Teaching sustainability can be done through the English language Classroom. If the focus is taken away from the language to sustainable content, then children of primary levels will learn English more enjoyably and awareness of sustainability will be created from an early age which will help them prepare better for the future. Thus, light needs to be shed upon the English textbook to see how many contents are sustainable and if the students can be taught language using those contents or not according to teachers' perception. It also needs to be seen if language learning and future consciousness are created in students or not by teaching sustainability. Without systematically going through the whole process, a conclusion cannot be drawn about the teaching sustainability situation in the mentioned context.

4. Research Objectives:-

This research is conducted with the following general objective:

- To find teachers' perceptions regarding ensuring teaching sustainability in the English language classroom at the primary level of education in Bangladesh.
The specific objectives are:
- To analyse the contents of English for Today, Book- V, to find how much they align with ESD.
- To find teachers' views about the pedagogy of English Language teaching at the primary level in Bangladesh
- To explore teachers' perception of applying CLIL in teaching sustainability in the EFL classroom.

5. Research Questions

This study is taken forward by setting the research questions stated below:

- How much do the contents of English for Today align with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)?
- How is English as a foreign language being taught at the primary level in Bangladesh according to teachers?
- How can CLIL be applied in teaching sustainability in the EFL classroom based on teachers' perceptions?

6. Literature Review:-

Bowden (2010) explored in an article the connections between learning and sustainability and the emerging discourse of Education for Sustainability (EfS). He showed the ways to reinforce English language teaching's (ELT) influence on sustainability by providing sustainable education's goal, image and plan for being change agents.

Nanni and Seranni (2015), based on the teaching experiences at a major Thai university, discussed Project Based Learning (PBL) in an English for academic purpose programme meeting most of the Thomas' criteria of PBL which aims students to be autonomous learners. The project commencing with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework will make students better citizens with an awareness of sustainability while improving their language proficiency.

Fauzia (2016) conducted a qualitative study and presented an adapted system of R and D research for creating an English area. In the English area, learners have the chance to upgrade the standards of language learning, which consequentially turns out to be one of the most crucial issues of the long-lasting education programme.

Amin and Greenwood (2018) in a qualitative study examined the procedures for choosing, hiring, preparing, and advancing Bangladeshi secondary English teachers. Though the government took various initiatives to train teachers to adopt a communicative approach, very few are stimulated by the short training whereas others perceive it challenging to materialise the new learnings into reality. The model for teachers' training is not favourable for sustainable teacher development.

Students get a chance to discuss and learn real-life sustainable development themes in classes of foreign languages and English as a foreign language serves as a good means to attain both communicative and sustainable development competence. In the research carried out in 5 universities in Lithuania by Asta and Margarita (2018), students' active participation is found in sustainable development subjects and resources but constantly providing innovative topics is challenging for the teachers.

Kwee (2021) portrayed the key elements affecting teachers' drives for including the United Nation's (2015) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a qualitative case study based on Social Cognitive Career Theory. By interviewing teachers and observing how Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is actualized in language classrooms, he found that teachers' individual reliance, dedication to accomplishing learning objectives, and helpful supervision of school uplifts self-efficacy and motivation for combining SDGs into English teaching.

Xiao and Pan (2022), in a survey-research, explored the intrinsic and extrinsic enablers of sustainable development knowledge in the daily routine of those students whose first language is not English. The research in the Sustainable Development Education course of Chinese higher education institutions where Structural Equation Modelling was applied, suggested comparatively easily comprehended contents for students having English as a foreign language.

In an article, Svanström et al. (2008) studied the learning outcome (LOs) proposed in the Tbilisi and Barcelona declarations which have common attributes with education for sustainability. It is found that the commonalities of LOs include sustainability directly or indirectly which will improve the quality of higher education. They didn't mention anything regarding the amalgamation of sustainability education at the primary level and the LOs of that.

Students' perception of sustainable development concepts is studied by Khalil, Ramzy and Mostafa (2013). The role of universities in teaching sustainable concepts was discussed as all students viewed that sustainable content is necessary for their lives and future. Their research is limited to university-level students only.

In order to respond to the call of environmental issues, Jodoin and Singer (2019) in their article attempted a framework showing the foundations of EFL contents and language contents suggested by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both linked with ESD to build a future with attitudes, values and future change. The research showed that sustainable topics are tough for children to comprehend, thus the implementation will work best from at least the secondary level. However, the contents can be adapted for children and the basics can be taught to them from an early age which will be the focus of this study.

Arslan and Curle (2021), conducted a qualitative study to investigate the syllabus and textbooks of high school and whether they reflect sustainable development goals (SDG) or not. Textbooks for compulsory foreign language study, which is English in Turkey, reflect sustainable development topics in a very limited range with an emphasis on health-related content.

6.1 Research Gap

Very few previous research has shed light on teaching sustainability in English language classrooms to primary-level students. This study is special for its Bangladeshi context and the level of education chosen. Besides, the mixed

method through which sustainability teaching has been evaluated, along with an analysis of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) approved English textbook and perception regarding implementing ESD and CLIL, make it unique.

7. Theoretical Framework

This study has taken Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as a basis to analyse the contents of the English textbooks of the primary school curriculum which is supposed to have sustainable topics in order to facilitate achieving SDGs. It is a concept developed for systematic understanding of sustainability in order to face the environmental, social and economic challenges to bring a change in the education systems for promoting and practicing sustainability by heart and actions. It involves, “integrating key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning. This may include, for example, instruction about climate change, disaster risk education, biodiversity, poverty reduction and sustainable consumption.” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013). ESD has been used as the direction for coding the text and finding the existence of those with the ultimate purpose of finding lessons that align with ESD so that learning becomes interesting because of the orientation of new concepts and awareness for a behavioural change being created. Hence, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is another approach grounded on which the study proceeds. Proposed by European Commission policy in the late 20th century, CLIL is built around the principle that people can learn a second language better if it is taught by content rather than language itself. It considers learners' needs and appreciates individual development. As CLIL provides scopes to choose real-life content required for social survival, thus it helps to explore whether sustainability topics can be chosen as the content of CLIL.

8. Research Methodology:-

This research has used a mixed method while conducting the research which is descriptive in type. The primary sources of data for this research are the NCTB-approved textbook English for Today, Book-V, survey, and interviews of the teachers. The secondary sources of data for this research are books, research reports, scholarly articles and online journals. The data collection tools of this research are – a survey questionnaire, hand notes, and a textbook. In this research, purposive sampling of non-probability sampling is used to select two urban schools from Dhaka and Mymensingh, one semi-urban school of Mymensingh and one rural school of Sirajganj. The sample size is 10 teachers of 4 govt. Primary schools.

9. Data Analysis and Discussion:-

9.1 Content Analysis of Textbook

In the NCTB-approved textbook English for Today, Book- V, there is the presence of environment-related themes in various lessons. “Eat Healthy” discusses about food pyramid and health. “Be Healthy” also talks about healthy food, needed for staying fit. Both of these lessons are related to sustainable consumption. “How Far is Saint Martin’s?” highlights a few tourist places in our country and shows the biodiversity, like turtles, sea fishes and other sea creatures. It also draws attention to the clean and blue water, which is beautiful when unpolluted. “City and Country” lesson consists of a poem showing a contrasting picture of a city and village, where the village is close to nature and the city is more polluted. “I Meant to Do My Work” is a poem stressing to focus on the ignored beautiful creatures of nature and the beautiful natural environment. “It Was a Great Day!” is a lesson about cub camporee. But it picturizes Sreemangal, a tourist place in Bangladesh, having tea gardens, forests with different animals, small hills, etc. “Stay safe!” mainly discusses the precautionary measures of earthquakes but it also draws attention to other natural disasters. “Cyclone Aila” as the name suggests talks about a cyclone, the damage it did to people’s lives and environment and the post-disaster management of it. “Story: The Hare and The Tortoise” and “Story: Why Does the Frog Croak” are moral and fictional. But they have pictures and picturizations of forests and animals which can drive students’ attention to the environment and conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem. The mentioned lessons align with ESD, some of which are incorporated in the survey and interview to bring out the facts and meet the objectives.

9.2 Analysis and Discussion of Teachers’ Questionnaire

12 MCQs were given to the teachers to know their perceptions. Most of the 4-point Likert scale options are coded as “A= Not at all”, “B= Little”, “C= Fairly” and “D= Very Much” in the text and graphical analysis where A and B will be considered as “negative responses” and C and D as “positive responses”.

9.2.1 Students’ Preferred Way of Learning

All the teachers participating in the survey think students prefer learning in small groups.

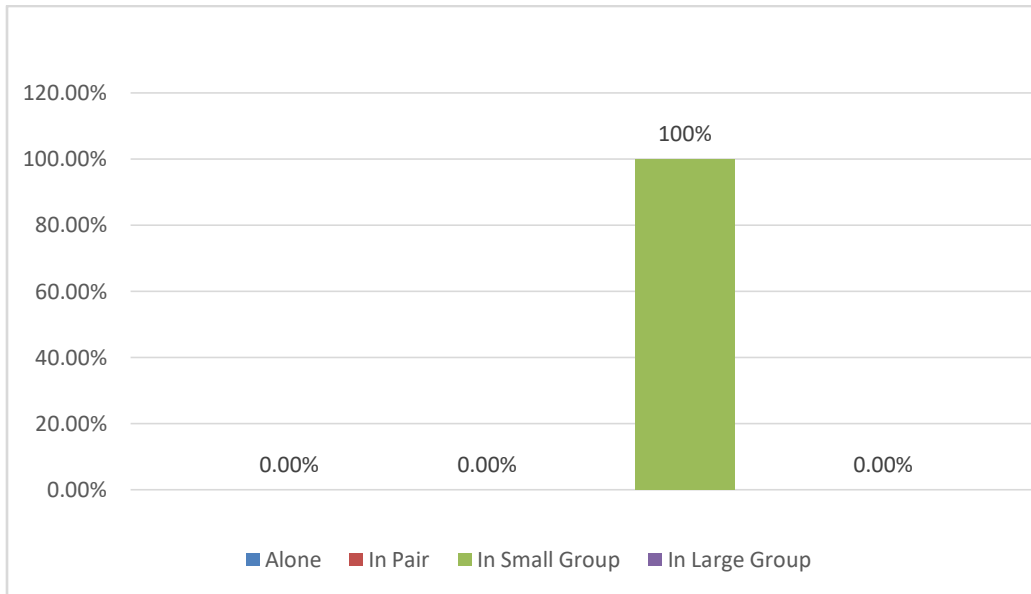


Figure 1:-Students’ preferred way of learning.

But all students can't have the same preference for learning. Thus, a change should be there in teaching and learning style where teachers are aware of students’ liking and are taught according to make the learning fun for them.

9.2.2 Problems Found in the Class Lesson

20% of teachers did not find any problem. 80% informed about finding “little problem”. This shows that teachers are very confident about their classes, and they might not be able to detect the challenges.

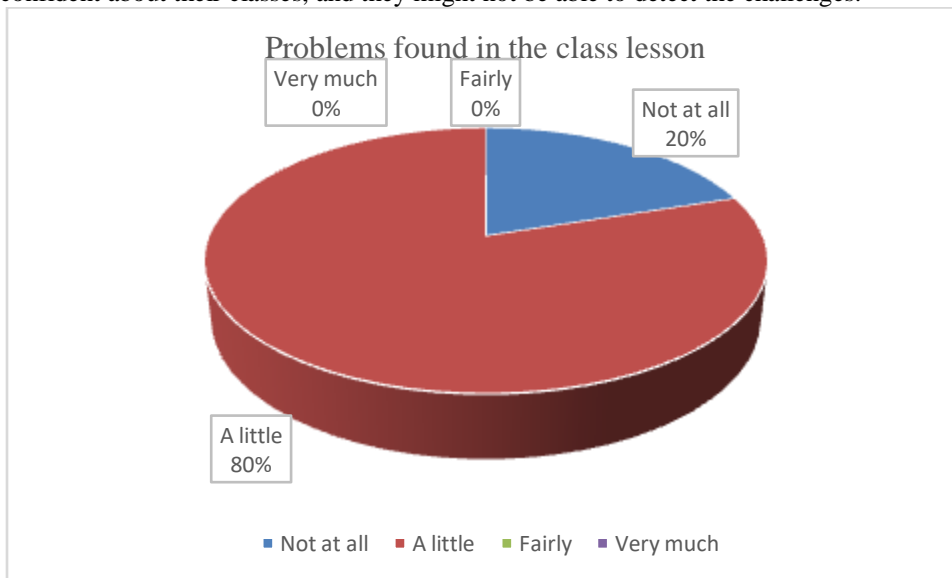


Figure 2:-Problems found in the class lesson.

Hence, the current pedagogy used in the classrooms has some anomalies demanding new approaches, where CLIL has a scope to facilitate students’ learning by allowing lessons to be adapted as per the needs of students.

9.2.3 Relevance of Class Lessons with Everyday Activities

In order to understand the current pedagogy and how much textbook is followed in the class, a question was posed. The lessons of the class should also be relevant to everyday activities because most of the lessons in the textbook are

designed in that way. 100% of teachers gave positive responses where 40% replied about “very much” relevance and 60% replied about “fairly” relevance. Thus, some lessons in the class should be revised or lessons in the textbook should be followed more to make the class lessons more relevant and practical.

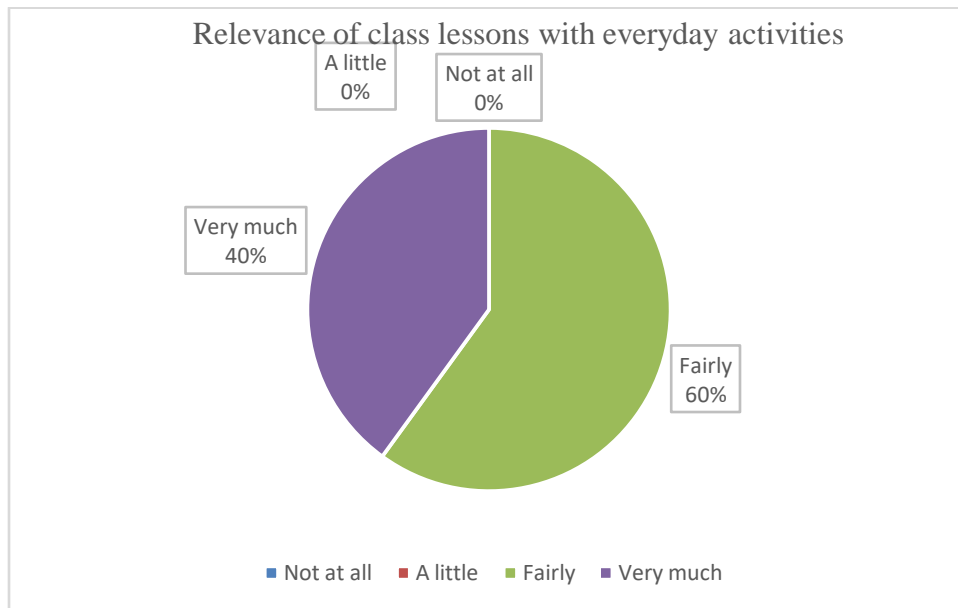


Figure 3:-Relevance of class lessons with everyday activities.

9.2.4 Study Materials Used in the Class

In response to the direct question, 100% of teachers said about using “pictures” in the class. 80% of teachers viewed about using both “posters” and “videos”. It is a positive and hopeful scenario when the curriculum stresses the use of multimedia in the classroom.

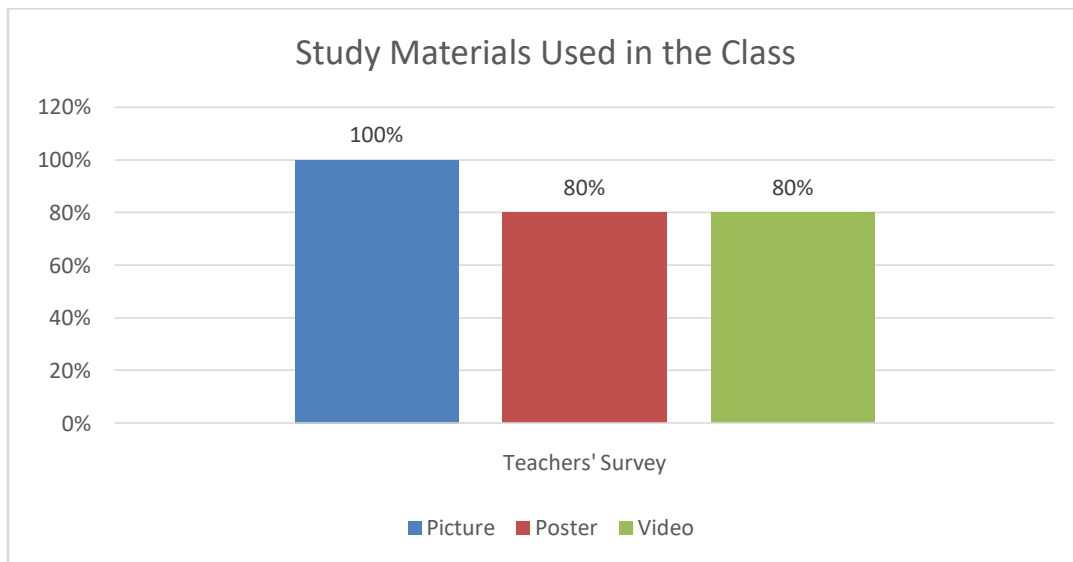


Figure 4:-Study materials used in the class.

9.2.5 Lessons Preferred by the Students in the Class

A question was asked about the lessons preferred by their students to find out whether teachers are aware of the interests of students. The following are the percentages of teachers’ views.

Lessons Preferred in the Class	Number of Teachers (in Percentage)
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Speaking with Others in English	80%
Healthy Food	80%
How to Stay Healthy	100%
Your Home District	100%
Tourist Spots of Bangladesh	60%
Writing Letter in English	80%
Learning Clock Time	40%
Tale of Hare and Tortoise	100%
Learning Handicrafts	40%
Different Games and Sports	100%
Martyr Monument (Shaheed Minar)	80%
Village and city	60%
Liberation War of Bangladesh	80%
Cub Camporee	80%
How to Stay Safe	80%
Cyclone Aila	60%

Table 1:- lessons preferred by the students in the class.

In short, teachers think a few sustainable topics are less preferred by students or maybe they think they are tough for students which opens the path of implementing CLIL for teaching sustainability as it has scopes of simplifying lessons.

9.2.6 Teachers’ View Regarding Students’ Writing Skill in English

An indirect question was asked to know teachers’ perceptions about the writing skills of students. They were asked if their students can write five sentences about their own home in English. 20% of teachers think that their students can write “very much” about their own home in English. 80% of them think that students can write “fairly” 5 sentences in English.

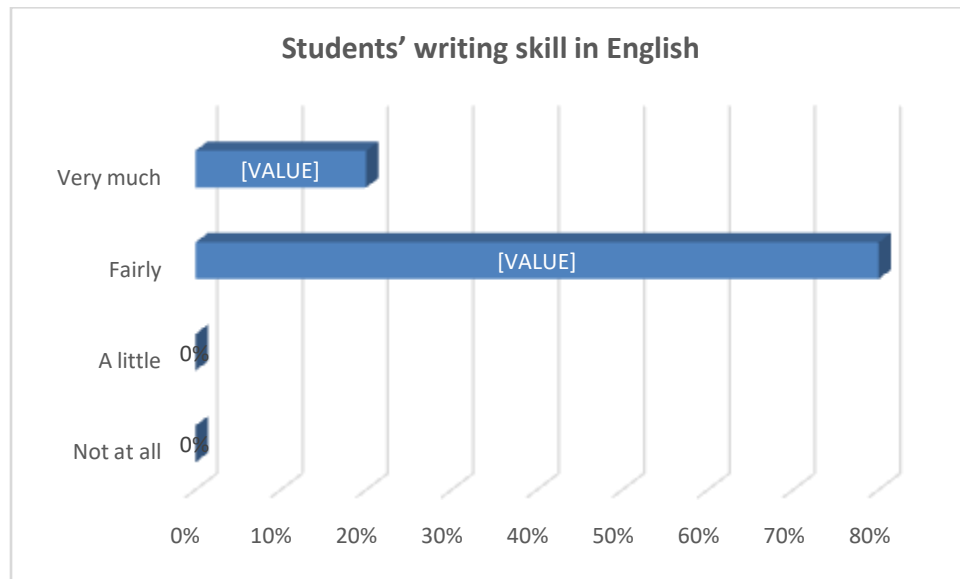


Figure 5:-Students’ writing skill in English.

This data shows that teachers are very confident about their students’ writing skills and the effectiveness of their current teaching style, but the reality is quite different.

9.2.7 Teachers’ Idea about Students’Enjoying Urban and Rural Stories

40% of teachers think their students enjoy reading urban and rural stories “very much”. 60% of them gave negative responses and viewed that students enjoy these stories “a little”. As teachers think students do not enjoy such stories

much there is a possibility of avoidance which might hinder the achievement of sustainability through CLIL. However, teachers' views about students' lesson preferences showed a different scenario.

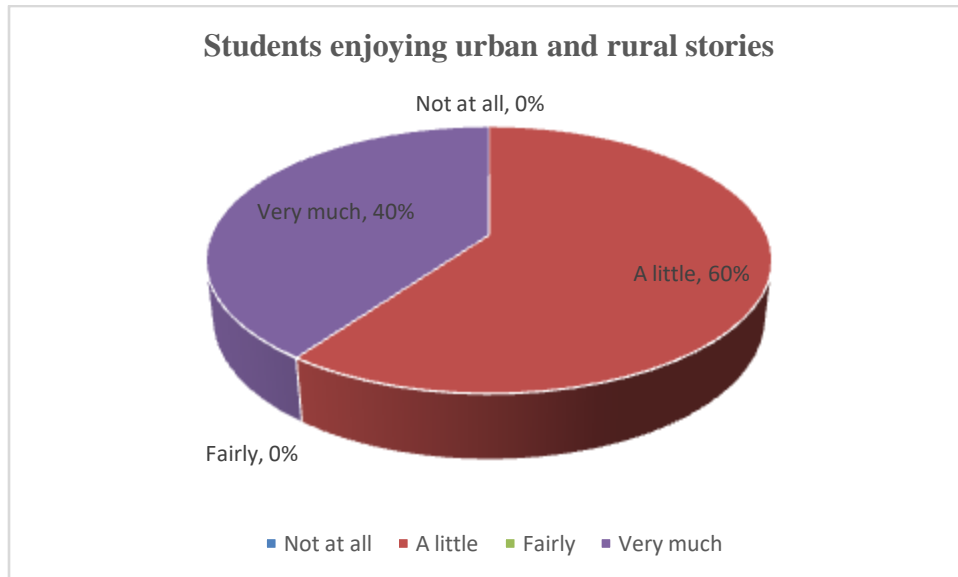


Figure 6:-Students enjoying urban and rural stories.

9.2.8 Students’ Ability to Name Tourist Places of Bangladesh

If students could name many tourist places in Bangladesh which are in the textbooks, this would indicate they learnt those lessons well and some consciousness about the environment and biodiversity presented in those lessons are also grown in them. Hence, teachers were asked if their students can name the tourist places in Bangladesh.

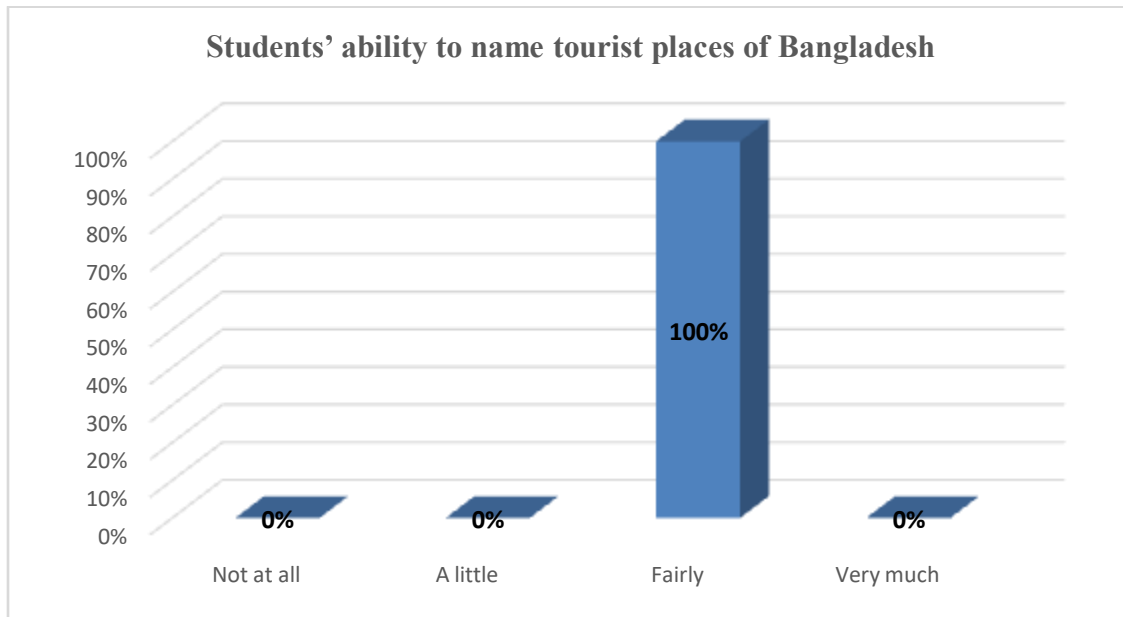


Figure 7:-Students’ ability to name tourist places of Bangladesh.

100% of teachers thought their students can “fairly” name the tourist places in Bangladesh. Hence students are interested in such topics and gaining knowledge that can be enhanced by CLIL.

9.2.9 Students' Ability to Talk about Environment Pollution in English

80% of teachers opined positively ("fairly") in response to the question and 20% opined negatively which was "little". This reflects the problem in the current pedagogy of primary level because students like reading these topics (informed in previous questions) but their outcome is not satisfactory.

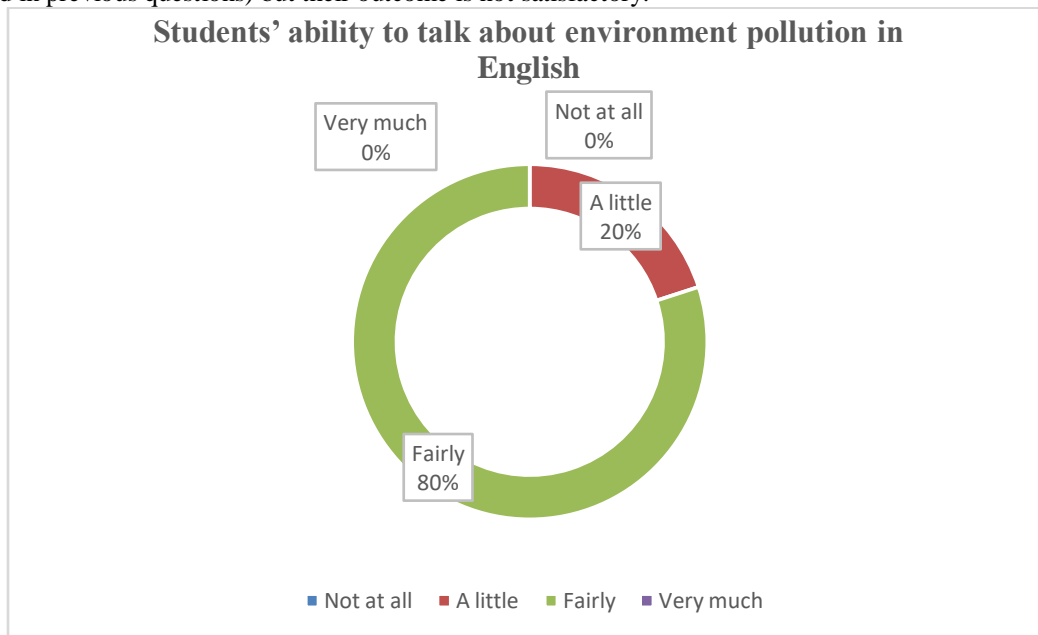


Figure 8:-Students' ability to talk about environment pollution in English.

9.3 Analysis and Discussion of Interview Questionnaire

Ten (10) teachers participated in the structured interview. Teachers participating in the interview are coded as T1, T2, T3.....T10 respectively to keep their identity confidential. The data obtained from the interview are discussed below:

9.3.1 Trainings

The teachers were asked whether they had any formal training in teaching. This was asked to understand the competence of the teachers. All the respondents have at least one training. They have subject-based training, Diploma in Primary Education (DPed) training, TCG training, etc. Thus, they should teach all four skills to students with multimedia content to make the lessons easier and more interesting.

9.3.2 How Class-V Students are Taught

Students are taught by using multimedia or different study materials. They are taught individually, in pairs and in groups too. T2 informed that first, they use English and then translate it into Bengali as students can't completely understand English. "They are taught using the IPT Lesson Plan", replied T3. IPT Lesson Plan is an input, practice and test-based lesson plan which is a framework of teaching English For Today book. Hence, if they are trained for CLIL, they can also implement it.

9.3.3 Teach Language Skills through Lessons

Teachers think the lessons of English For Today can be used to teach English language skills better. "Besides Grammar book is needed", added T2. While most teachers think the lessons in textbooks would be enough to teach language skills to students in a better way, some think the necessity of Grammar books for doing that.

9.3.4 Environment Pollution, Natural Disaster and Health related Lessons Easier and Enjoyable

These kinds of lessons are easier and more enjoyable for students as they are related to our lives. There should be more such lessons. "They are tough", commented T4. Teachers thinking these lessons are easier and enjoyable will tend to emphasize these lessons more for which teaching sustainability can be ensured but when teachers think these lessons to be difficult for students, they actually recommend revising such lessons, making teaching sustainability difficult.

9.3.5 Consciousness of Students about Environment Pollution and Natural Disasters

Students now-a-days are quite conscious about environmental pollution and natural disasters as they are taught by using multimedia to them the lessons easier. They also play roles in raising awareness of their family members. While T4 replied in the negative.

9.3.6 Use of Study Materials for Lessons

Every teacher uses study materials for their class lessons which is appreciable and facilitates students' learning experiences. Hence, they can be used by the teachers when CLIL will be applied for teaching sustainability.

9.3.7 Application of CLIL

In response to the direct question, teachers reflected different viewpoints. As per T1 and T2, the application of CLIL is possible due to the availability of sustainable content. While T3 thinks it would be challenging due to the scarcity of trained teachers and T4 viewed that CLIL would be tough for primary level students.

10. Findings:-

The findings of the posed research questions are discussed below:

10.1 Alignment of the Contents of English For Today With ESD

Most of the lessons have the themes of ESD content. And, as this research specified the topics related to the environment as ESD contents, more than half of the lessons of English For Today, Book-V align with ESD which can be used for teaching sustainability to primary level students.

10.2 Pedagogy of Teaching at Primary Level

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is roughly used at the primary level as the pedagogy of teaching. This can be concluded because teachers do not only use target language. They explain grammar or rules extensively in class. They also use different study materials like pictures, posters, videos, etc. Teachers play an active role in the class by being the dictator or instructor and students passively follow. Thus, the pedagogy of teaching at primary level schools is not interactive and students' needs and interests are not addressed.

10.3 Application of CLIL for Teaching Sustainability in EFL Classroom

For teaching sustainability in a stress-free manner in an EFL classroom, which is an English class, Content and Language Integrative Learning (CLIL) can be applied according to some teachers. Because students still feel frightened about English classes. There are available contents in the book that align with ESD and students like those. Therefore, if environment-related contents are taught then for teaching their preferred lessons, they will feel interested, and the focus will shift from language learning to content learning. In a stress-free and participatory teaching environment, they can learn language better. Hence, language skills will be achieved by them along with the learning of contents. Besides, CLIL allows modifications of lessons according to the needs of students. However, some teachers have a negative view due to the scarcity of competent and trained teachers. While one viewed it to be difficult for students. Though provisions of the use of study materials if used properly would make the lessons even easier and the learning fruitful.

11. Recommendations:-

Based on the data and insights found from the study, some recommendations for teaching sustainability in the English Language Classrooms are given below:

- Teachers should be given extensive training about the effective application of CLIL.
- Teachers' perception towards teaching sustainability should be positively changed and they should realise its significance first.
- A guideline or guidebook of the adapted lessons or simplified lessons should be provided to teachers so that they can make the contents easier for students.
- As teaching sustainability in English language classrooms is a bit challenging for teachers, the class duration should be more than half an hour.
- Teachers should overcome the barrier of competence they think students have.
- There should be flexibility in the syllabus, or it should be roughly tuned as teachers will be required to adapt lessons according to students' needs and interests.

11. Conclusion:-

In a nutshell, teaching sustainability is the demand of the time for facing the challenges of this fast-paced world. In order to meet the goal of SDG, there is no alternative to increase awareness through teaching sustainability which can be better done if exposed to such knowledge from an early age. More than half of the contents of English For Today align with ESD, opening the door for the application of CLIL. CLIL which needs contents from different disciplines, can take the sustainability contents of the English textbook for teaching sustainability. As the current pedagogy of teaching used at the primary level is not very successful and students do not enjoy the classes, CLIL can be applied to make the classes enjoyable by shifting the focus to contents to ensure better language and sustainable learning. For that teachers need to be trained and their realization of the significance of this subject matter is needed. Only then, teaching sustainability, the ultimate defence mechanism for destructive global change can be achieved, in English language classrooms.

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