



## ACTIVITY BASED METHOD OF LEARNING OF ENGLISH IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF AGRICULTURAL AREA OF HOOGHLY DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL IN PRE AND POST COVID 19 ERA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

The system of school education of the developing and under developed countries of the world mainly runs through traditional education system, executed within four walls using chalk duster method. After the endemic COVID 19 was over after its terror of at least three years, school education limped to traditional four walls school system on being processed with the effect of digital gadgets, learning, pseudo leaning, non-learning and dropout. The urban students could easily adapt the change in school education during COVID 19. But question arises whether the rural, agricultural and subaltern group of pupils did fairly adapt the change in educational practices during COVID period. The study analyzed students' activity in primary schools of West Bengal before and after COVID 19 in terms of skills set by their textbook *Butterfly*. Classroom observation technique and focused group interview has been adopted for the present study. The study found that quality of learning and ultimate outcome of education in primary schools of agricultural areas declined after COVID 19 pandemic. Rural areas failed to take the opportunity of digital environment to continue and enrich their learning. The end effects as the gap in quality of learning enlarges in before and after pandemic.

**Keywords:** *Activity Based Method, COVID 19, Second Language Skills, Agricultural areas, Elementary schools*

#### Introduction

The system of school education of the developing and under developed countries of the world mainly runs through traditional education system, executed within four walls using chalk duster method. This was the most prevalent picture of school education at least before onset of COVID 19 endemic. In such system students were used to come educational institutions regularly, attended classes and perform activities physically in classrooms. It may be recalled here that school education system of West Bengal before endemic was not much influenced by digital gadgets and digital communication. Education system of India as well as West Bengal was already in search of quality and equity in the pre COVID period. In March 2020 the sudden outbreak the endemic, forced to close all the schools and physical communication between teachers and students came to a halt throughout the world. The embryonic online system was used infrequently was pressed to service for teaching learning of the students in the world, in India as well in West Bengal, a constituent state of India. The unprepared shifting of the learners from traditional environment to digital environment of education made them confused and fearful about the future of their learning. During pandemic teachers and students remained exotic from one another. Pandemic unleashed its pandemonium at least for three years. The online teaching learning system, anyhow, kept the show of education on. A section of students could reap well from this online teaching learning because of their contact with computers, smart phones and other public media. But another section of pupils could not utilize the scope of online education. They are mainly hailed from rural areas, agricultural belts electricity and internet facilities are only marginal. Home environment has strong relationship with learning. Achievement of the rural and urban students has significant difference (McCracken and Barcinas 1991, Cartwright and Allen 2002, Singh, Rahman and Hoon 2010, Bhattacharje, Wadwa and Banerji 2011, Hnatkovska and Lahiri 2012, Nworgu and Nworgu 2013, Zhang, Li and Xue 2015).

Learners form rural areas were not familiar with substantial and constructive use of technology, not interested to learn from multiple learning media. In this context UNESCO observed that 0.32 billion children of India have been affected by school closure due to COVID 19 Pandemic among – those 84% belong to rural areas and 70% attended government administered schools (Alvi & Gupta, 2020). After the endemic was over after its terror of at least three years, school education again returned to traditional four walls school system on being processed with the effect of digital gadgets, learning, pseudo leaning, non-learning and dropout. The urban students could easily adapt the change in school education during COVID 19. But question

arises whether the rural, agricultural and subaltern group of pupils did fairly adapt the change in educational practices during COVID period. For the development of school education, it necessary to compare latter type of students' performance in the school subjects before and after the COVID 19 era.

### Emergence of the Problem

Out of different skill subjects in Primary schools the English (L<sub>2</sub>) sets a great difficulty to the students where the students start to learn both L<sub>1</sub> & L<sub>2</sub>. For learning the skills of L<sub>2</sub>, *Butterfly* the recommended manual of WBBPE helped a lot to learn English during pre COVID 19 and post COVID 19 periods in West Bengal. Government of India has taken several initiatives towards digital infrastructure and e-learning across the country (India Report-Digital Education, 2021). Acquisition of second language can be divided in four skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing. Rural elementary schools of West Bengal follow Activity Based Learning or learning by doing as successful 'pedagogy' of teaching learning. The effect of e-learning was practiced in urban and elite schools before, during and after COVID period. In rural schools or in the schools of agricultural belt learning was used for maintaining education system running anyhow. The students of agrarian society unlike their urban counterpart might not adapt the rapid change of educational system, media and methodology. These difficulties are likely to affect the activity learning in L<sub>2</sub> and learning four skills. In West Bengal, Hooghly is one of the model agricultural districts. So the students of Primary schools of the agricultural area have considered as population of the study. The present investigator studied activities of the students in English as the part of a project in pre COVID era in this district. The data collected earlier would serve as a basis of comparison.

### Objectives of the Study

- To explore students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal before COVID 19.
- To explore students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal after COVID 19.
- To understand differences in students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal in before and after COVID 19.
- To know the teachers' opinion to understand differences in students' activity of elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal in before and after COVID 19.

### Research Questions

- What is the status of Students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal before COVID 19?
- What is the status of Students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal after COVID 19?
- What are the differences in Students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal before and after COVID 19?
- What is the teachers' opinion about different status in students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal in before and after COVID 19?

### Delimitations of the Study

- The study is limited to the schools of agricultural areas of Hooghly district only.
- The study is confined to the status of students' activity in learning skills of English.

### The Terms Defined

**Elementary Schools:** The present researcher has considered government aided schools under WBBPE. The present researcher considered the class IV only.

**Activity:** Activity is largely diversified in its nature. Language learning can be divided into development of interrelated four skills. The present researcher has considered eight activities from four skills of second language acquisition. All activities are adopted from their textbook *Butterfly*. The activities are followed as below,

Skills	Activity
Listening skill	Attention towards loud reading
	Attention towards discussion
Reading skill	Reading text
	Reading worksheets
Speaking skill	Sharing of opinion
	Use of gesture
Writing skill	Answering worksheets
	Construction of sentences

### Method adopted for the Study

The study has distinctly two parts:

1. the pre COVID data were collected from a project undertaken by the present researcher in primary schools of Hooghly district based on skills of English language (Hazra, 2019).
2. Post COVID data were collected in the same way in 2024.

Descriptive method and survey type design has been adopted for the present study. The study involves in analyzing only students' activity in natural setting in pre and post COVID scenario. Random sampling technique has been adopted for selection of schools. A non-participatory observation schedule has been adopted by the researcher to study the state-of-art of students' activity. Classroom observation technique has a long and strong tradition of assessing English language classroom throughout the world (O, Leary, 2014, 2020). To overcome the difficulty and enhance reliability in observation and recording of the activity in the large classroom the researcher took the service of some trained associates. Running notes have been taken on the targeted activity. A complete class of forty minutes has been observed by the researcher with trained associate in ten schools of different blocks of agricultural areas of Hooghly district. A focus group interview has been taken from their respective teachers to corroborate the observation in status of students' activity as well as to ensure validity in observation.

### Data Presentation

#### Students' Activity before and after COVID 19:

Activity	Observation and recording of the activity before COVID 19	Observation and recording of the activity after COVID 19
<b>Attention towards loud reading</b>	In the second language classroom attention of the learners towards loud reading of teacher not up to the mark. Students are acquainted with loud reading of the text from <i>Butterfly</i> . 70% of them discuss among themselves due to not proper understanding of the target language.	Listening of the text develops interest in target language. Only 15% students tried to give attention towards loud reading of the teacher in classroom. A large number of students are not attentive towards loud reading of the text by the teacher.
<b>Attention towards discussion</b>	Teacher sometimes discuss with the students in target language. Students, guided by teachers are sometimes involved among themselves to discuss in target language. 75% students look at stare towards the discussion took place in the classroom in English language.	Only 10% students are involved in discussion in English language with peer or teacher. Most of the students are less attentive towards the discussion in target language.
<b>Reading text</b>	Teacher instructs students to read the text loudly or sometimes in silent from <i>Butterfly</i> . They started with great enthusiasm but most of them failed to read it in line. 70% of them are enthusiastic about reading but lack the speed, accuracy and ability to complete the sentences.	Teacher use <i>Butterfly</i> and instruct their students to read loudly from the book. They started with enthusiasm but after that remain silent gradually. 80% of them are talking with each other in regional language. 10% of them did not try to read loudly.
<b>Reading worksheets</b>	Teacher gave them activity in worksheets but majority of them are filling worksheets in looking others. 10% of them knew the correct answer but lacked confidence in filling it. Most of them need to be attentive towards pronunciation.	85% students tried to read the worksheets but failed to complete the instruction or tasks. Most of the learners are filling worksheets in looking others. Some of them started to answer it without reading the instruction properly.
<b>Sharing of opinion</b>	Home environment has strong relationship with learning. Achievement of the rural and urban students has significant difference (McCracken and Barcinas 1991, Cartwright and Allen 2002, Singh, Rahman and Hoon 2010, Bhattacharje, Wadwa and Banerji 2011, Hnatkovska and Lahiri 2012, Nworgu and Nworgu 2013, Zhang, Li and Xue 2015).	Home environment has strong relationship with learning. Achievement of the rural and urban students has significant difference (McCracken and Barcinas 1991, Cartwright and Allen 2002, Singh, Rahman and Hoon 2010, Bhattacharje, Wadwa and Banerji 2011, Hnatkovska and Lahiri 2012, Nworgu and Nworgu 2013, Zhang, Li and Xue 2015).
<b>Use of Gesture</b>	Use of gesture improves sense of communication in speaking. The greater part of the students moves their hands while speaking. Movement of eye is least in speaking. 75% students tried to use gesture in speaking but lack the coordination of pronunciation and use of gesture.	Use of gesture plays key role in speaking. The majority of the students move their hands while speaking. Movement of eye or facial expression is least in speaking. 80% students tried to use gesture in speaking but lack the coordination of pronunciation and use of gesture.
<b>Answering worksheets</b>	78% students are not proficient in reading and understanding activity of worksheets. A large number of students complete <i>a, an the</i> fill up tasks	80% students are not performing satisfactory enough to write answer in worksheets. Majority of them complete <i>tick the correct answer</i> tasks and <i>fill in the</i>

Activity	Observation and recording of the activity before COVID 19	Observation and recording of the activity after COVID 19
	and <i>matching items</i> tasks at the earliest. Their filling up of worksheets is not satisfactory enough. Illegible handwriting is noticeable point in answering worksheet.	<i>blanks</i> at the earliest. But most of the answers of the activity are wrong or need to rephrase. Handwriting of few students are legible.
<b>Construction of sentences</b>	Construction of sentences in writing activity is instructed and sometimes guided by the teacher of the classroom. Almost 75% students paused in middle of the sentences. Learners tried to construct sentences in target language but most of them failed to complete it and giving complete sense. Spelling mistake is noticeable.	In writing activity construction of sentences is a leading activity sometimes guided by the teacher according to the nature of the classroom. 80% Students are less efficient to construct sentences in target language. Spelling mistakes are noticeable in the sentences. A large portion of the students are not able to write complete sentences. They need attention in spelling.

### Teachers' Opinion

Teachers' Opinion has been collected from the Focus group Interview. Some major points have been found. These are pointed below:

**Irreverent use of Digital Gadgets:** Most of the students use smart phones or some of them use computer without proper guidance of the parents in home. It seriously affected their reading habits and makes them involved in irrelevant task. Rural students failed to take opportunity of digital learning during and after pandemic.

**Deficiency in attention:** The irreverent use of mobile phones seriously affected their attention and mental health. They are all exposure to deficient in observation, listening and recognition. A large gap in physical classroom affected their learning.

**Socio-economic Condition of the parents:** Before COVID 19 and also after it socio economic condition of the parents was not satisfactory enough. Sometimes students are involved in agriculture related activity in their homes. Some of them remain absent in the school for a long time in the agricultural season of potato cultivation. It affected their learning.

### Data Analysis

#### Differences in Students' Activity before and after COVID 19:

Activity	Status of activity before COVID 19	Status of activity after COVID 19
<b>Attention towards loud reading</b>	In the second language classroom attention of the learners towards loud reading of teacher not up to the mark.	Lack of attention towards loud reading enlarges after pandemic.
<b>Attention towards discussion</b>	Students, guided by teachers are sometimes involved among themselves to discuss in target language.	Some of them are attentive towards discussion in English language.
<b>Reading text</b>	They started with great enthusiasm but most of them failed to read it in line.	Majority of them started with enthusiasm but after that remain silent gradually.
<b>Reading worksheets</b>	Most of the learners are less interested in reading worksheets.	Most of the learners are filling worksheets in looking others. Most of them need care in pronunciation.
<b>Sharing of opinion</b>	A handful of students share opinions with their teacher or peer in English language.	Use of target language in sharing opinion is negligible.
<b>Use of Gesture</b>	Most of the learners are not habituated in use of gesture.	Some of them coordinate in pronunciation and use of gesture.
<b>Answering worksheets</b>	A small percentage of students answer worksheets in proper way.	Their filling up of worksheets is not satisfactory enough.
<b>Construction of sentences</b>	Most of the learners are not able to construct complete sentences in target language.	Some of them able to give complete sense in sentences in English language.

### Data Corroboration of the Data

Teachers' opinion corroborates the low spirited status of students' activity after COVID 19 pandemic.

### Teachers' Opinion

After COVID19, school education again returned to traditional four walls school system on being processed with the effect of digital gadgets, learning, pseudo learning, non-learning and dropout. Students become more irregular, less motivated and less attentive towards learning especially in second language classroom after COVID 19.

### **Findings of the Study**

- What is the status of Students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal before COVID 19?

Attention towards loud reading and discussion of the classroom is minimal.

A small number of students tried to read the texts and worksheets.

Students' discussion, free sharing of opinions and use of gesture were only microscopic.

Answering worksheets and construction of sentences lay below the desired level.

- What is the status of Students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal after COVID 19?

Majority of the students failed to give attention towards loud reading and discussion.

Most of them indulged in irreverent talks in regional language.

A large number of students did not share opinion and use gesture in speaking and other activities for learning English that demanded gesticulation.

Most of the students were not acquainted with the use of worksheets. Illegible handwriting and spelling mistakes were noticeable points of the writing activity.

- What are the differences in Students' activity in elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal before and after COVID 19?

The major difference found in activities of listening and reading skills is lack of attention towards learning. The noticeable difference found in activities of reading and writing skills is illegible handwriting and writing incomplete sentences.

- What is the teachers' opinion about different status in students' activity of elementary schools of agricultural area of Hooghly district of West Bengal in before and after COVID 19?

Teachers pointed out that students become more irregular, less motivated and less attentive towards learning especially in second language classroom. The gap in quality of learning enlarges due to long closure of schools to combat pandemic situation in relation to parental socio-economic condition.

### **Discussion**

Students' activity based on four skills of English language learning before COVID 19 was not satisfactory enough. Most of the rural students lack attention towards loud reading and discussion took place in the classroom in target language. They are talking frequently in regional language in the classroom. They lose pace in loud reading and reading worksheets. Most of them are not acquainted with the use of worksheets. They mostly use eye and hand as gesture while speaking but lack coordination. Spelling mistakes are noticeable in the sentences. Rural elementary education suffers in their performance and state-of-art of activity The patterns and findings are in tune with the findings of Hnatkovska and Lahiri 2012, Nworgu and Nworgu 2013, Zhang, Li and Xue 2015 and Hazra 2019. During as well as after COVID 19 the rural education system still suffers and staggers like the findings of Pham, 2021 and Choudhary and Mishra, 2022. The gap in quality of learning enlarges due to long absence in the physical classroom and inadequate and misguided use of digital means to continue their learning. Students are using smart phones in their home without proper guidance of the parents and affect their learning. Students lack motivation and involvement in learning in English language. Parental socio-economic condition also affected it. The findings are in agreement with Fahad (2023) and Dhar, D &Pahari, S. (2024). Teachers' opinions corroborate the findings of the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The present researcher did not use any digital recording in classrooms investigations due to some limitations and ethical consideration of the research.

### **Conclusion**

Most of the rural schools have high P-T Ratio. Learners from the rural areas failed to take advantage of online teaching learning because of their less and misguided contact with computers, smart phones and other public media. In relation to it students of agricultural belts suffer from inadequate electricity and internet facilities. The quality of learning and ultimate outcome of education declined after COVID 19 pandemic. Rural areas failed to take the opportunity of digital environment to continue and enrich their learning. The end effects as the gap in quality of learning enlarges in before and after pandemic.

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