

CLASSROOM CULTURE OF THE FEMALE TEACHERS IN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTES OF BANGLADESH: A QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Classroom is considered as the obvious place to occur learning and classroom activities play a great role in teaching-learning. This study was conducted in the polytechnic institutes of Bangladesh and the principal aim was to investigate the classroom culture of the female teachers of the polytechnic institutes. For the convenience of data collection 7 out of 43 government polytechnics were purposively taken as sample. The data were collected by the author himself with an observation schedule and through informal interviews with the students and the female teachers. It was found from the study that in most cases the classroom environment of the female teachers was not participatory though female teachers exhibited a very good teacher-student rapport. From the study it was recommended that, the female teachers should be well trained and be provided with modern books and Internet facilities. Besides, their teaching load should be reduced to a satisfactory level, and they should also be motivated by providing promotion on time.

Key Words

Classroom culture, classroom interaction, female teachers, polytechnic institutes.

Background and Rationale

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is considered as one of the effective ways for a society to develop its members' potentials to face the challenges of the future. With only the formal general education system (provided by the schools and other institutions) a society or a country cannot achieve the

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conditions for sustainable development. A society consists of man and woman, according to the World Population Prospects 2004, the world's male and female ratio is 101:100, i.e., almost half of the world's population is female. Ignoring their presence in the workforce we cannot expect any development in the economical, environmental or social aspects of a country. Therefore, to obtain the conditions for sustainable development or to accelerate the development of a country we must include these women in the workforce of the country and they could contribute effectively only if they are educated. In these circumstances women have a great opportunity to participate in the workforce and to improve their standards of living and social status through TVET. Therefore, in TVET along with the men, the women are to be equally educated. Realizing this issue the Government of Bangladesh has established 43 polytechnic institutes (some are yet to be functioning) all over the country (Ministry of Education, GOB). Among these polytechnics some are exclusively for girls known as Mohila Polytechnic. From different studies it has been found that the number of girls' participation and retention increase if the number of female teachers increases in the institution (Mian, 2001). There is always an apprehension that the classroom culture of female teachers is different from male teachers and the female teachers' performances are not as much gratifying as to achieve the goals.

Students' achievement is directly linked with the teachers' quality and performance in the classroom. Wilson et al., (2001) reported a positive connection among the teachers' knowledge and preparation in the subject matter, their performance (teaching-learning activities) and impact in the classroom. According to Begum (2003), "classroom atmosphere and the activities that happen in it play a major role in ensuring quality learning and achievement of the learners". Therefore, the female teachers and their performances have a great influence in the development of the female workforce of the country. Considering the female teachers' contribution and importance in TVET, this study was a modest attempt to investigate the classroom culture of the female teachers in polytechnic institute in Bangladesh.

In this study the classroom culture is considered to be the condition of classroom teaching-learning, participation of students in the class, the teacher-student interaction, rapport building and the behaviour of the female teachers in the classroom.

Objectives of the Study

The main focus of the study was to observe the classroom culture of the female teachers in polytechnic institutes in Bangladesh and evaluate their performance. The specific objectives of the study were to

1. explore what is actually happening in classroom under the supervision of the female teachers in terms of teaching-learning activities.
2. analyze the ways through which teaching-learning takes place in the classroom of the female teachers.
3. observe the interaction between the students and the female teachers in the classroom.
4. assess the general opinion of the students regarding female teachers' classroom performance and behaviour.

Methodology

The study was based on the government polytechnic institutes of Bangladesh. For the convenience of data collection seven out of forty-three polytechnics were purposively chosen for the research. The polytechnics were: Dhaka Polytechnic Institute, Dhaka Mohila Polytechnic Institute, Mymansingh Polytechnic Institute, Khulna Polytechnic Institute, Dinajpur Polytechnic Institute, Rajshahi Mohila Polytechnic Institute and Joshohor Polytechnic Institute.

The study was based on data, collected by observation of classroom interaction during teaching-learning. To avoid any biasness the author himself conducted the observation with the help of an observation schedule of 5 point rating scale; the scale was followed by five responses these were: 5 (Very Good), 4 (Good), 3 (Moderate), 2 (Poor) and 1(Not at all). Data were also derived from informal interviews with the female teachers and the students of polytechnics.

Collected data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results were presented in a tabular and narrative form, identifying the pattern of teaching-learning approaches that were followed by the female teachers in the classroom.

The weighted average was computed for each item of the observation schedule using the following formula,

$$W = \frac{N_1 + 2N_2 + 3N_3 + 4N_4 + 5N_5}{N_1 + N_2 + N_3 + N_4 + N_5}$$

The weighted averages (WA)

were interpreted as: $WA \geq 4.5$ is "Very Good"; $4.5 > WA \geq 3.5$ is "Good"; $3.5 > WA \geq 2.5$ is "Moderate"; $2.5 > WA \geq 1.5$ is "Poor"; $1.5 > WA$ is "Not at All".

Findings

A. Classroom Observation

Some important aspects found from the classroom observation were grouped according to the important steps involved in classroom teaching and interaction. The observations were:

1. Orientation and Motivation

In the orientation session of the class, the female teachers related the lesson to the past experience of the students "moderately". The observed WA was 2.54 [Table I]. The female teachers stated the objectives of the lesson "poorly" (WA = 2.27). They were "moderately" able to motivate the students to the lesson (WA = 2.54). Finally, the teachers made the beginning of the lesson "moderately" interesting (WA = 2.8).

TABLE I
Classroom Activities of Female Teachers during Orientation and Motivation Step

Competencies	Level of Performance					WA
	Not at all (1)	Poor (2)	Moderate (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)	
Relate lesson to the past experience of the students	1 7%	7 47%	5 33%	2 13%		2.54
State explicitly the objectives of the lesson	5 33%	3 20%	5 33%	2 13%		2.27
Able to motivate the students to the lesson	1 7%	7 47%	5 33%	2 13%		2.54
Make the beginning of the lesson interesting		7 47%	4 27%	4 27%		2.80

2. Organization and Presentation of the Topic

According to Table II the performance of the female teachers of the polytechnic was "good" in presenting the lesson sequentially from easy to hard. But their performance was "moderate" in preparation for the lecture (WA = 3.00) and in using recently developed illustrations and examples (WA = 2.87).

TABLE II
Female Teachers and their Organization and Presentation of the Topic

Competencies	Level of Performance					WA
	Not at all (1)	Poor (2)	Moderate (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)	
Present the lesson sequentially from easy to hard			5 33%	7 47%	3 20%	3.87
The teacher comes to the class with well-prepared lecture		4 33%	8 20%	2 33%	1 13%	3.00
Use recently developed illustrations and examples	2 13%	4 27%	5 33%	2 13%	2 13%	2.87

3. Use of Teaching Aids

All the teachers used chalkboard in the class. Their chalkboard management was good as the observed weighted average is 3.74, [Table III]. Nobody used any other teaching aids (e.g. Over Head Projector (OHP) or Picture or Chart) other than chalkboard (WA = 1.00).

TABLE III
Female Teachers and the Use of Teaching Aids

Competencies	Level of Performance					WA
	Not at all (1)	Poor (2)	Moderate (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)	
Effectiveness of the use and management of chalkboard		2 13%	4 27%	5 33%	4 27%	3.74
Use varied instructional materials	15 100%					3.00

4. Student Participation

From Table IV, all the female teachers encouraged their students to practice the lesson at home by giving homework. The performance of the teachers in asking questions in the class; the performance of the students in asking questions and answering teachers' questions were "poor" (WA = 2.40, 1.6 and 2.20). In allowing the students to ask question, the teachers' performance was "moderate" as the observed weighted average was 2.74.

TABLE IV
Classroom Activities of Female Teachers and Student Participation

Competencies	Level of Performance					WA
	Not at all (1)	Poor (2)	Moderate (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)	
Encourage students to practice their lesson at home by giving home work					15 100%	5.00
Teacher asks questions to the class	3 20%	7 47%	2 13%	2 13%	1 7%	2.40
Allow the students to ask question for clarification		8 53%	4 27%	2 13%	1 7%	2.74
Students ask questions to the teacher	8 53%	5 33%	2 13%			1.60
Students answer the questions	3 20%	8 53%	2 13%	2 13%		2.2

5. Assessment

According to the observations the female teachers were "good" in summarizing the key points at the end of the class (WA = 3.74), but were "poor" in evaluating the students at the end of the class [Table V].

TABLE V

Classroom Activities of Female Teachers Regarding Student Assessment

Competencies	Level of Performance					WA
	Not at all (1)	Poor (2)	Moderate (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)	
The teacher summarizes key points at the end of the class		2 13%	4 27%	5 33%	4 27%	3.7 4
Evaluate the students at the end of the lesson	8 53%		1 7%	2 13%		1.8

6. Overall Teaching in the Classroom

About 67% of the female teachers were delayed for about 5 to 10 minutes in coming to the class and some of them left the classroom 5 to 10 minutes before the class time is over. Female teachers' "poor" gesture and movement were observed during the class (WA = 1.74). The female teachers preferred to stand still and deliver their lecture. Their vocal, facial and eye expressions were good (WA = 4.40). The female teachers had a "moderate" management of the classroom time (WA = 3.20). Their pronunciation was "very good" (WA = 4.67). The female teachers delivered the lecture at a "good" speed (WA = 3.67). The female teachers exhibited a "very good" teacher-student rapport in the class as well as out of the class. (WA = 4.87). [Table VI]

TABLE VI
Overall Classroom Performance of the Female Teachers

Competencies	Level of Performance					WA
	Not at all (1)	Poor (2)	Moderate (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)	
How punctual are the female teacher in the class?		6 40%	4 27%	3 20%	2 13%	3.07
Gesture, movement of the female teacher.	9 60%	3 20%	1 7%	2 13%		1.74
Use of proper vocal, facial and eye expression in the class.			2 13%	5 33%	8 53%	4.40
Effective management of the classroom time.		3 20%	8 53%	2 13%	2 13%	3.20
The pronunciation is clear and appropriate				5 33%	10 67%	4.67
Speed of Lecture			8 53%	4 27%	3 20%	3.67
Teacher-student rapport				2 13%	13 87%	4.87

B. Informal Interview with the students

From the informal interview with the students the following aspects were found regarding the classroom culture of the female teachers:

1. The female teachers do not use sufficient illustrations and examples from real situation.
2. The female teachers do not use any teaching aids other than chalkboard.
3. The female teachers ask a few questions in the class.
4. The female teachers behave well with the students.
5. The female teachers' pronunciation is good.
6. They use proper voice (loud and clear) in the class.
7. At the end of the class the female teachers give homework or assignment to the students.
8. The students are more likely to study only during the exam days rather than through out the semester.

C. Informal Interview with female teachers

Informal interviews were arranged with the female teachers. The findings were:

1. Other than chalkboards, teaching aids are not adequate in the institute.
2. There is no assistant to help the female teachers to carry and install the OHP in the classroom.
3. The average teaching load of the female teachers is 23 hours per week.
4. The teachers are not satisfied with their teaching load.
5. Their preferred teaching load is 16 hours per week.
6. For better teaching the female teachers' requirements are as follows:
 - a. Teachers' training,
 - b. Library facilities,
 - c. New teaching aids,
 - d. Internet access.
7. All the teachers use lecture method and a few of them use question-answer method along with lecture.
8. All the teachers use local textbooks and note books for the class.
9. Most of the students' quality is not upto the mark.
10. The students' main concern is to pass in the examination; few of them are motivated to learn.
11. The teachers are not getting promotion for a long time.

Discussion

From the class observation it was found that the overall performance of the female teachers in the orientation and motivation step was not good enough but according to Rao, (1993) "in lecture method students are provided with readymade knowledge by the teacher and due to this spoon feeding the students loses interest..." therefore, it is very important to motivate the students towards the class that is getting students attention. This deficiency of performance of female teachers may be due to the fact that they do not have enough access to the modern books and Internet, which also was revealed from interview of the female teachers. Due to the same reason their performance in organizing and presenting the subject matter in the class was good but not the

best, which should be improved to enhance the quality of education in the polytechnic.

It was also found that the female as well as the male teachers were late to come to the class. This may be due to the fact that there is no gap between two consecutive classes. After one class the students go out of their class for some refreshment or other purposes, so if the teachers come on time they do not find enough students to start with.

Also we saw that except chalkboard the female teachers did not use any teaching aids for their class. This may be due to the fact that, each polytechnic institute has a very limited number of OHP and other modern teaching aids. Therefore, permanent installation of the OHP is not possible in the classroom. So the teachers have to carry and install the OHP themselves, which is very difficult for a female teacher. Also they do not get cooperation from the authority to install the OHP in the classroom. According to Mohan, (2002) "proper use of audio-visual aids requires a considerable investment of time and thought", she also mentioned that, "the teacher should be skilled in the use of the aid". Due to over load the female teachers do not have enough time to prepare their teaching aids.

Classroom practices in any format regard the classroom teachers as the donor of knowledge and students as the recipient of that knowledge. According to Begum (2003), "classroom is considered as the obvious site for the event learning to occur, as if, learning would happen solely through the classroom activities". From the classroom observation and the informal interview with the teachers and students it was found that the classroom environment of the female teachers was not much interactive. It may be due to the fact that most of the students' quality was not upto the mark. It was found that the students did not participate in the classroom activities and they were mostly passive in the teaching-learning process. Besides, the female teachers were also asking few questions in the class. Therefore, the classroom environment of the female teachers in most cases was not participatory.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The quality of the classroom culture will ensure the quality of the polytechnic output. The female teachers have a great role to play as a model for the girls to come to this field and continue their

education and career in TVET, and to contribute in the sustainable development of the country, if the female teachers can create a classroom culture, which is supportive to teaching learning process, the students will be greatly motivated to learn. This will have a great impact on the improvement of the quality of the polytechnic products and they will be able to survive in the competitive job market. Therefore, the classroom milieu should receive top preference and needs to be enhanced to ensure quality output from the polytechnic institutes.

To ensure a quality classroom culture and quality education the following recommendations were made:

1. In many competencies (e.g., orientation & motivation, presentation of the topic, use of different teaching aids, students participation of classroom teaching-learning, evaluating the students at the end of the class, gesture and movement in the class) the female teachers' performances were moderate and poor, which resulted in poor classroom culture. To improve their performance in those competencies they should be well trained in the following field: teaching methods, preparation and use of teaching aids, preparation and use of lesson plan, questioning during the class, student assessment / evaluation.
2. The female teachers of the polytechnic should be acquainted with the current technological development by reading more modern books and accessing the Internet, so that they can come to the class with very good preparation and use recently developed illustrations and examples.
3. Each department should have more than one OHP and there should be an assistant to carry and install the OHP in the classroom and bring back at the end of the class.
4. The ways in which teaching-learning takes place in the classroom of a female teachers were mostly passive, the interaction between the students and the female teacher in the classroom should be improved. For this purpose, to get good quality students there should be provision for admission test along with the current system (selection according to high GPA). Besides, the female teachers should be trained to conduct participatory teaching-learning in the classroom.

5. There should be at least 5 minutes gap between two classes so that the female teachers and students have some time to go from one class to another and refresh their mind and body. Which will allow the female teachers to start the next class on time with most of the students in the class.
6. The female teachers should use lesson plan for effective management of their classroom time.
7. To motivate the female teachers the promotion system of the polytechnic institute should be improved. Also they should be given more time to prepare for the classes by reducing their teaching load (average) from 23 hours to 16 hours per week.

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