

Effect of Culture on English Language Practice: A Comparative Study between the Urban and the Rural Background Students

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Abstract

The present paper endeavors to discover if cultural backgrounds based on locations affect Bangladeshi learners' English language practices in the long run or not. There are many disparities between the urban and rural areas of Bangladesh in terms of having proper facilities to practice English. However, the present study has been done on students from similar economic and family backgrounds in order to know solely the details about urban and rural cultural impacts on their English language practices, specially, outside the classrooms. A mixed-method has been used to conduct the study. The paper throws light into how urban and rural area-based cultures influence students' outlook towards English language and its practice.

Keywords: mixed-method, cultural orientation, pedagogy, static.

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I. Introduction

The relation between culture and language learning has been discussed for a long time. It has been thrown light upon by many scholars, linguists including Sapir (1958) who argued that the correlation between language and culture is so intense that one cannot be understood without understanding others. Though in Bangladesh English is taught as a mandatory subject from class 1 to 12, many students fail to be proficient in English. The reasons behind the failure are many including lack of inadequate skilled teachers and training facilities, lack of materials, resources.

Apart from these, learner's local culture can immensely impact the learning of a second or foreign language. The long tradition of the country is that the teacher has to be obeyed without any scope of negotiation. This culture automatically makes the class teacher-centered. Also, those who live in urban areas have better opportunities and exposure to the internet, television, English speaking communities which help them know the English language and culture. At tertiary level students come from different backgrounds to have higher education. In many universities English is the medium of instruction. So, it becomes very important to have a good command over English. Also, without proper English language skills, it becomes difficult to ensure good job opportunities. In most of the cases, the performance of urban area students remains better than students who come from rural backgrounds. Even after studying together and having the same lessons for some years, this difference remains very much apparent.

II. Research Objectives

The general objective of the paper is: to find out the longitudinal effects of cultural backgrounds on English language practices done by the students of Bangladesh University of Professionals. The Specific objectives of this research are-

1. To find out whether despite studying in the same university and having similar economic backgrounds, students' English practices get influenced by their rural or urban area based cultural backgrounds or not.
2. To find out whether the outlook towards English language and culture varies depending on location based cultural background or not.

III. Literature Review

Language and culture are correlated. Kim (2003) states that learning of a second or foreign language enables one to view life through another cultural lens. Culture is something that differentiates one group of people from another. It includes what people believe in, what values they hold, which norms they maintain, which customs and traditions they follow, what rituals they follow. Culture plays an important role in learning language. Regarding this Genc (2005) mentions that it is important to teach language learners about the culture of the target language. It aids in making them aware of the differences and similarities between their own culture and the culture of the target language. Otherwise, it is possible for learners to become culture-bound individuals who would wrongly judge the culture of the target language. Without knowing the culture of the target language learners can assume others' cultures as strange or disgraceful. Such emotions can hamper language learning. Similarly, Wang (2011) states that without knowing about the culture of the target language misconceptions may arise. Also, language use is a practical phenomenon. Many utterances literally mean something and are used in different contexts in real life. So, having knowledge of cultural background is necessary for proper second language acquisition.

Different places have different cultures. Such variations impact on students' motivation to learn a language. According to Lamb (2012), the motivation in learning English depends on the setting of the learners. Those who reside in metropolitan cities have more motivation for learning English. On the other hand, those who dwell outside the cities, have less motivation to learn English. So, the context from where a learner belongs plays an important role in the motivation for learning English. Ler (2012) states more specifically that students from rural backgrounds tend to believe that mathematics and science are more important than English. Thus, they do not give much importance to learning English. At the tertiary level for studying and doing research works, English is extremely necessary. Somehow, students have this false system of belief that English is not much important. Also, the environment in rural schools does not provide an appropriate environment for practicing English. Students do not get acquainted with English culture or language practice. Making English the medium of instruction can help students learn English better and get them acquainted with English culture as per the study. Similarly, Ullah (2017) states that sociocultural contexts can at times constraint the learning of English. Fear or anxiety hinders the successful learning of English. Students also hesitate at times to use English as using English is associated with being westernized. This makes learners hold themselves back from using English. In the same way, Begum (2014) mentions that the students in rural areas lag behind in achieving proficiency in English language for a number of reasons including proper lack of proper guidance at home, economic difficulties, not having a proper environment to English outside the classroom, Use of Bengali in English classroom.

In context of Bangladesh Ara (2017) mentions that native culture here plays a significant role in teaching English in the classrooms. The long tradition of the country is that the teacher has to be obeyed without any scope for negotiation. This culture automatically makes the class teacher centered. Also, those who live in urban areas have better opportunities, and exposure to the internet, television, and educated parents also help them know the English culture. This eventually, helps in learning English. Whereas, the students from rural areas lag behind. However, the study does not whether students from a similar economical background, but different geographical areas differ or not in practicing English. Similarly, Sharmin (2019) mentions that hesitance and shyness in asking questions in the class are too vivid among the rural area students. Thus, their problems regarding English language learning remain unsaid and unsolved. Sharmin (2019) focuses on proving better teachers at the primary level so that an appropriate environment for learning English can be created by them. However, any contrast between urban and rural background students has not been done in this paper. Also, the paper is concerned with primary level students only.

IV. Methodology

A mixed-method has been used for conducting the research work. 50 students studying at BUP have been purposively selected as the sample of the study. Half of the respondents have been selected from urban areas background and the other half from rural areas background. The economic background and professional status of parents have been kept similar for all 50 samples to observe the influence only culture on their English practice.

Data Analysis

Item 1: Frequency of Using English at Home

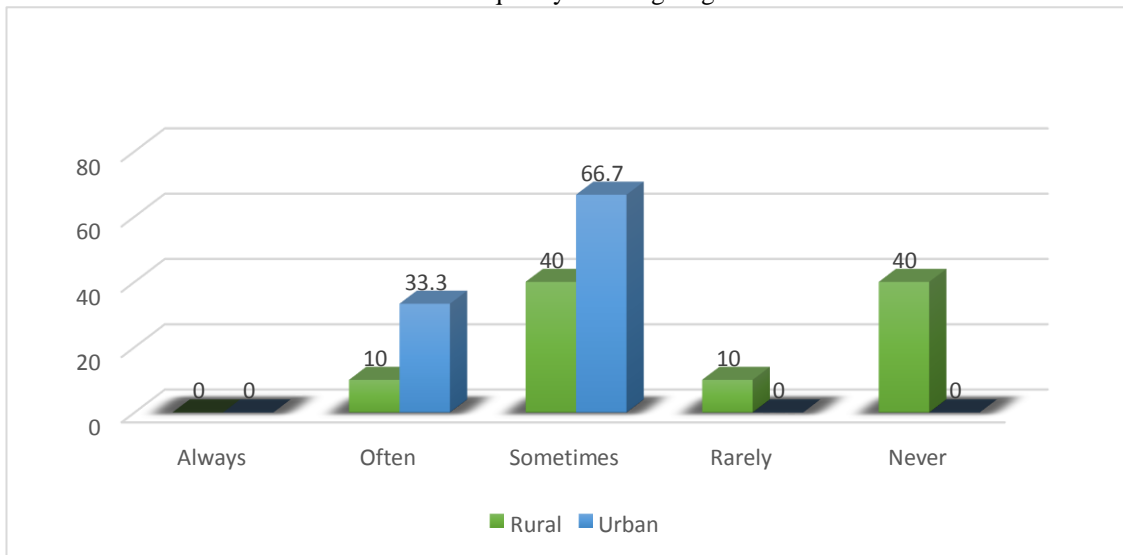


Figure: 1

33.3% of the students from urban areas responded that they often use English at home, whereas the response was only 10% in the case of the students from rural areas. Only 40% of students from rural areas responded that they sometimes use English at home. On the other hand, 66.7% of students from urban areas responded that they sometimes use English at home. 10% of rural areas students responded that they rarely use English at home but no student from urban areas responded to rarely using English at home. 40% of rural areas students responded that they never speak in English at home, whereas no student from the urban areas responded to never using English at home.

Item 2: Habit of Watching English Movies or Listening to English Songs

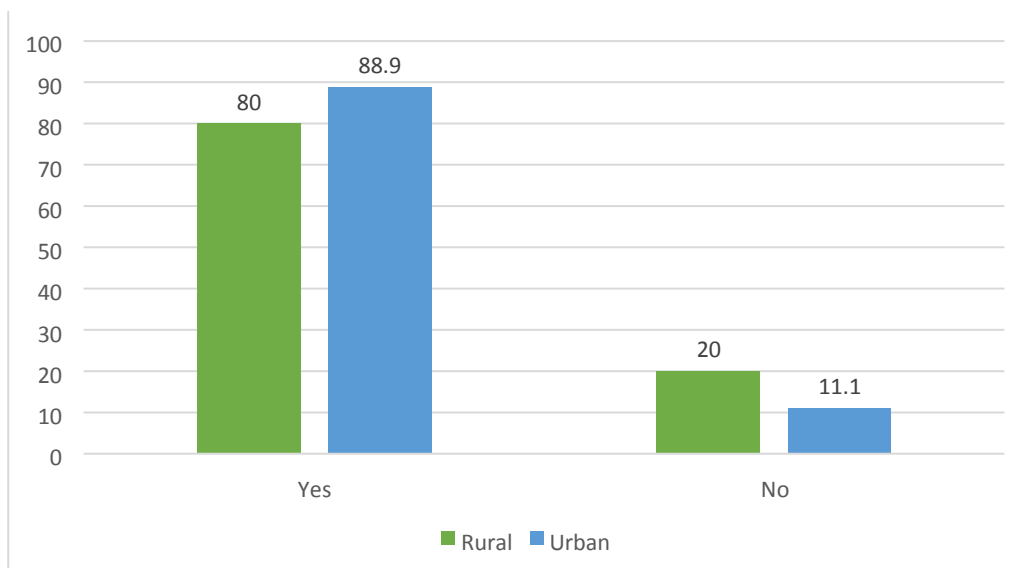


Figure: 2

80% of rural areas students responded that they watch English movies or listen to English songs, whereas the response was 88.9% from the urban area students. 20% of rural area students that they do not watch English movies or listen to English songs, on the other hand, the response was only 11.1% in case of urban area students.

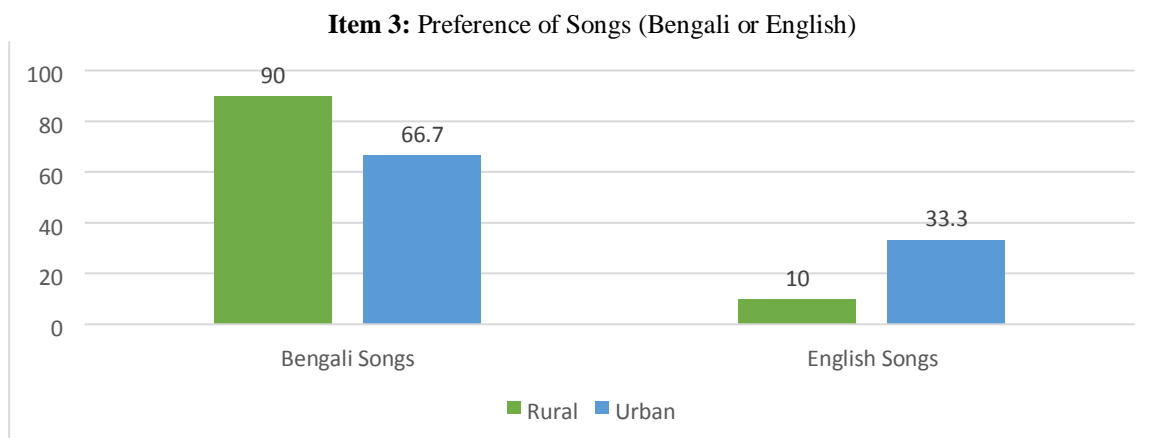


Figure: 3

90% of rural area students responded that they prefer Bengali songs over English songs, whereas, the response was only 66.7% in the case of the urban students. Only 10% of rural area students responded to preferring English songs over Bengali songs, whereas, the response is 33.3% in the case of the urban area students.

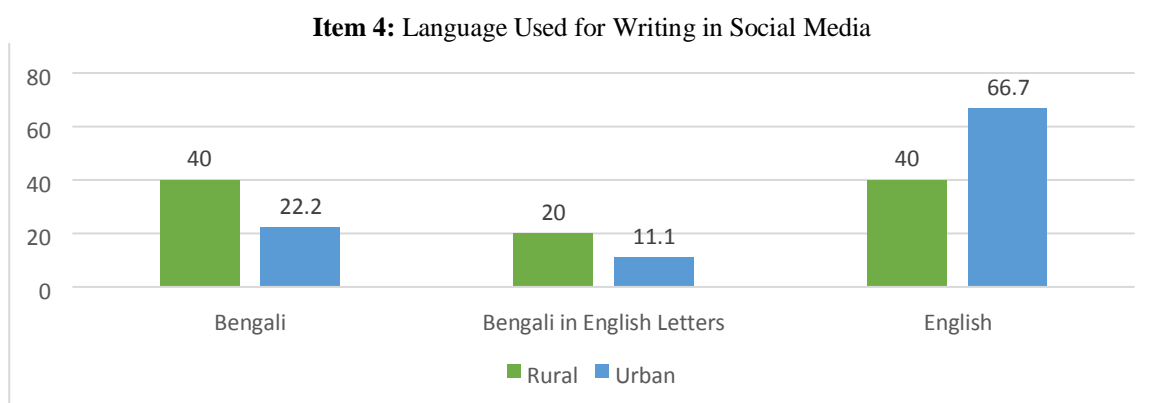


Figure: 4

40% of rural areas responded that they use the Bengali alphabets to write in social media, whereas, the response was only 22.2% in the case of urban area students. 20% of rural students use Bengali in English letters to write in social media whereas, 11.1% of urban students do so. 40% of rural area students use English to write in social media, on the other hand, 66.7% of urban area students use English to write in social media.

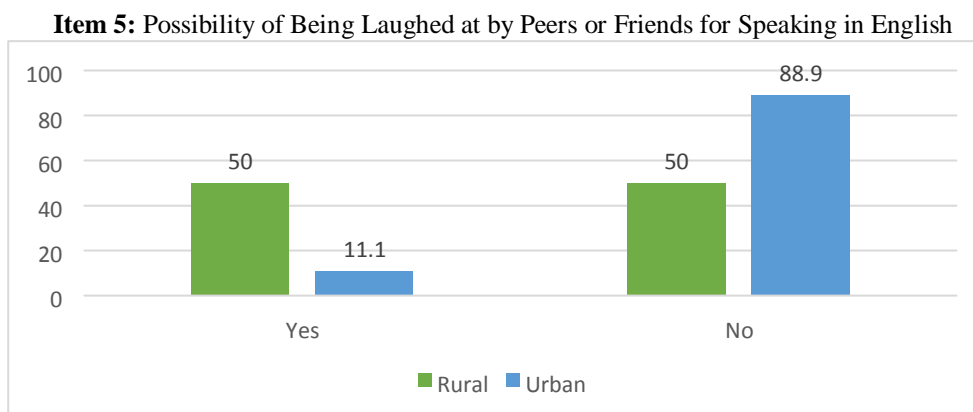


Figure: 5

50% of rural area students responded that there is a possibility of being laughed at by peers or classmates if they speak in English with them, whereas, the response is only 11.1% in the case of rural area students. 50% of the rural area students responded that they do not fear being laughed at by their peers or friends, on the other hand, 88.9% was the response in the case of the urban area students.

Item 6: Friend Circle's Proficiency in English

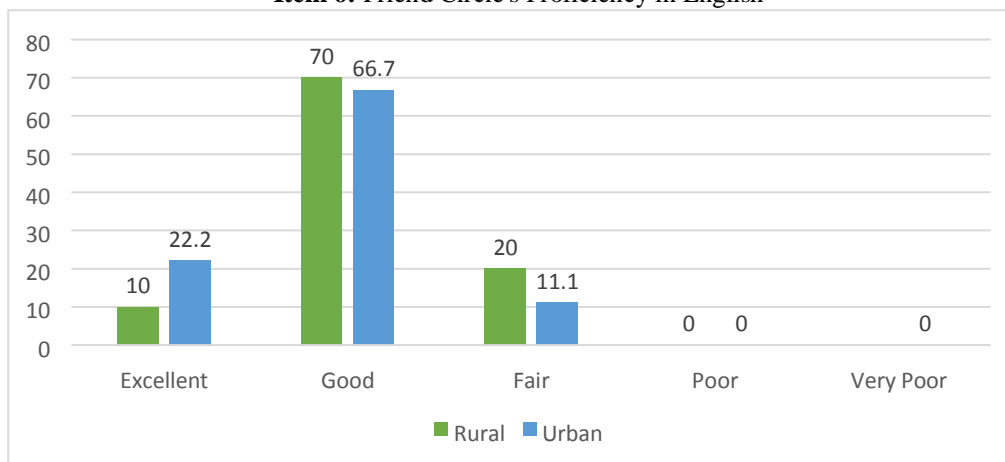


Figure: 6

Only 10% of rural area students responded that they think their friend circle has excellent proficiency in English and the response is 22.2% in the case of urban area students. 70% of Rural area students think that their friend circle's proficiency is good, whereas, the response is 66.7% in the case of urban area students. 20% of rural area students think that their friend circle has only a fair level of proficiency level in English, whereas the response is 11.1% in the case of urban area students.

Item 7: Own Proficiency Level in English

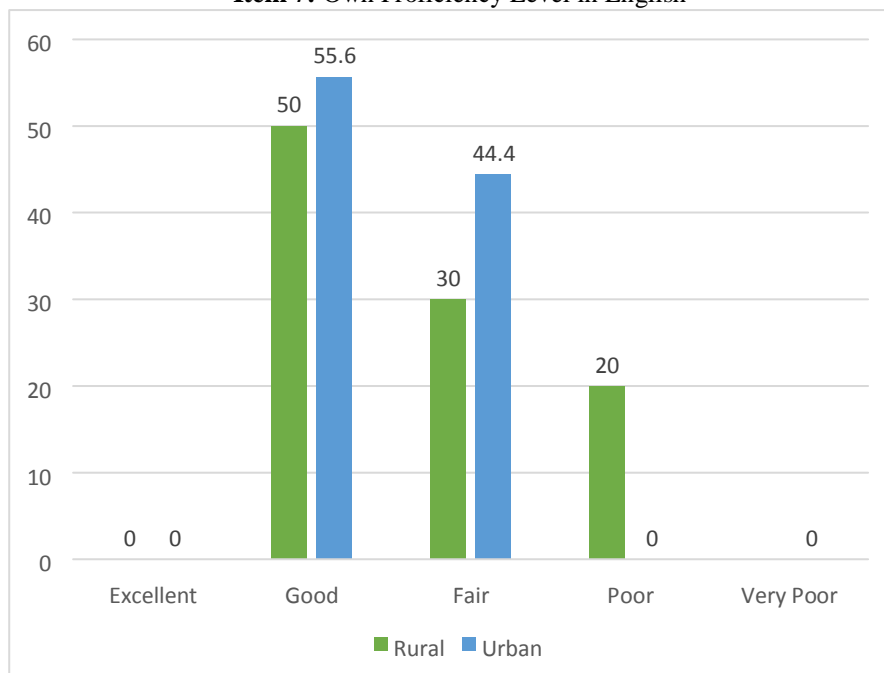


Figure: 7

50% of the rural area students responded that they think they have a good level of proficiency in English, whereas, the response is only 55.6% in the case of urban area students. 30% of rural areas responded that they have a fair level of proficiency in English, whereas, the response was 44.4% in the case of the urban

area students. None of the rural area students responded that they have poor proficiency in English, on the other hand, no urban area student responded to having poor proficiency in English.

Item 8: Influence of English Language can Make One Adapt English Culture

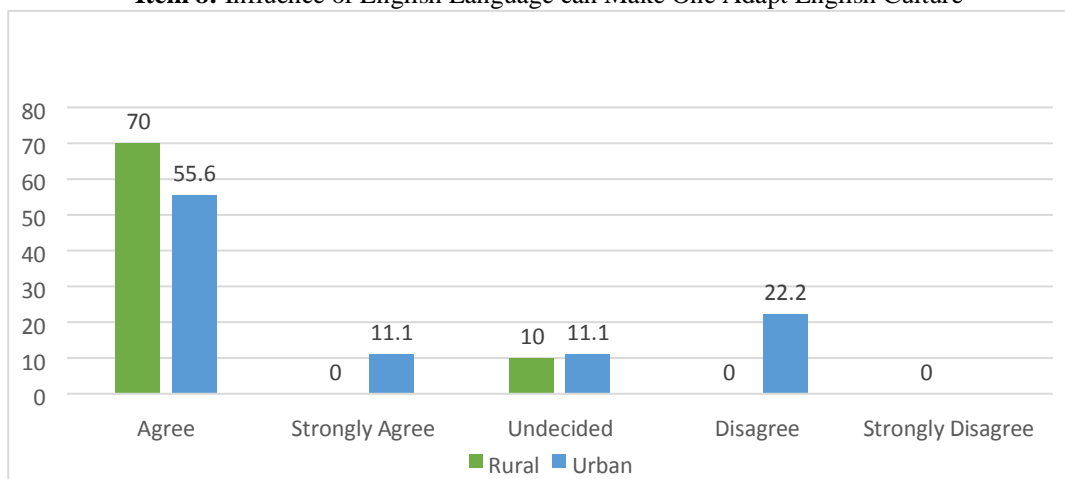


Figure: 8

70% of rural area students agreed that English language can make one adapt to English culture, whereas, the response is only 55.6% in the case of urban area students. 11.1% of the urban area students responded that they strongly agree that English language can make one adapt to English culture, no rural area student strongly agreed to it. 10% of the rural area students responded that they are unsure of it and the response was 11.1% in the case of urban students. 22% of the urban area students responded to disagreeing with it, whereas no rural area students disagreed.

Item 9: English Language is Used for Colonization and Suppression

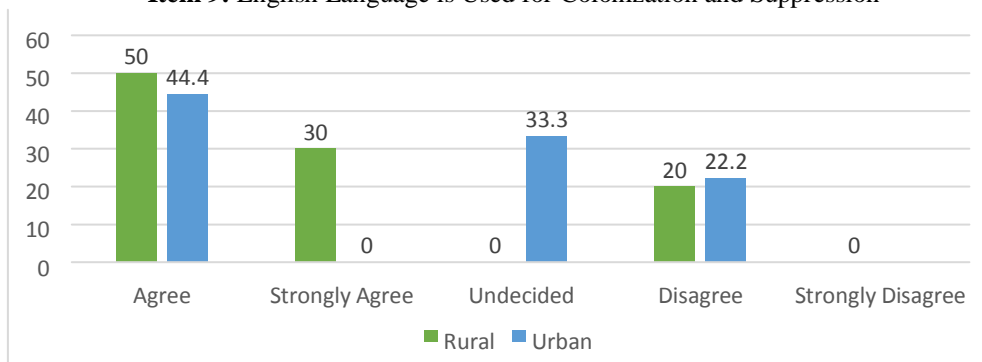


Figure: 9

50% of the rural area students agreed that English language is used for colonization and suppression, whereas, the response is 44.4% in the case of urban area students. 30% of the rural area students strongly agreed to it, whereas, no urban area students responded to it. 33.3% of the urban area students responded that they were undecided about it, there was no response to it from rural area students. 20% of the rural area students disagree with it whereas, the response was 22.2% in the case of urban area students.

V. Discussion and Findings

Impact of Culture on Students' Motivation

The cultures of urban and rural areas are different. Due to cultural background, some students feel inspired to use English, while others shy away from it. The fear of being laughed at by peers is a lot more in rural area background students than the urban area background students.

Half of the rural area based on students' fear of being laughed at by friends or classmates for using English, whereas, 88.9% of urban area students respond to having no such fear.

Impact of Culture on the Acceptance of English Language

Due to cultural background, prejudice against language varies which impacts language learning. More students from the rural area believed that English can influence one to adapt to the English culture. 22.2% of students from urban areas disagreed regarding it but no students from rural areas disagreed.

Students from rural areas agreed more in number than urban area students when asked about English language being used for colonization and suppression. No urban area students strongly agreed to it, whereas, 30% of rural area students agreed. So, rural area students tend to have a more negative outlook towards English language than urban area students.

Impact of Culture on English Proficiency Level

The level of confidence in urban areas students is much more than the rural area students in terms of having proficiency in English. 20% of rural area students think they have poor skills in English, whereas, no student from urban areas responded of having poor English language skills.

Culture and frequency of English Language Practice

Cultural backgrounds influence the language use of people. Half of the rural areas based students responded that they whether rarely or never speak English at home. Whereas, more than 90% of the urban area based students responded that they speak English often or sometimes. No urban area student responded to never using English at home.

Thus, to write in social media, more urban area students use English than rural area students and the difference is 26.7%. 60% of students from rural areas either use Bengali letters to write in social media or use Bengali written through English letters.

So, the response is almost double from the rural area students in terms of not having the habit of watching English movies or not listening to English songs. 90% of the rural area students prefer listening to Bengali songs and only 10% prefer listening to English songs, whereas, the preference of listening to English songs is 3 times more in the case of urban area students.

VI. Recommendations

The researcher presents some recommendations as follows:

1. English culture and custom related topics should be included in the English language classes in order to removing negative outlook and prejudice from the minds of the students. In this way, students from rural areas background can also have exposure to cultural orientation and be encouraged to use English.
2. Group works should be assigned more to the students that include the use of English. Each group should have members from both urban and rural backgrounds. The participation of each member of the group should be ensured. In this way, the rural background students would not be confined within themselves and can come out of shyness.
3. English classes can include different videos, movies set in English native setting. In this way, students from rural areas can get acquainted better with English culture
4. Motivational contents can be introduced in the class in order to removing English language anxiety from the minds of rural background students.
5. Tasks that require the use of English outside the classroom should be assigned to students.
6. In rural area based English classrooms, from the primary level English as a medium of instruction should be introduced and skilled teachers are to be appointed. Salary increases and other facilities can be provided to encourage skilled people in joining at the primary level.

The study was conducted with very few participants due to a lack of time and Covid-19 epidemics. Some more aspects need to be discussed to strengthen a study. But all academic institutions are off for this Covid-19 epidemic. So, it was not possible to shed light on different aspects.

VII. Conclusion

The cultural backgrounds of learners play an important role in their motivation to use English language. Rural area students who have a privileged economic background and educated parents also tend to use English less than urban background students. Cultural background plays a significant role in the long run in terms of English language use. Despite studying in the same institution, the impact of cultural background in relation to language use remains evident. Because of the differences in cultural orientations, urban and rural students' frequency, motivation, and outlook towards English practice differ significantly. To make students come to a balanced ground in terms of English practice, the group works, English cultural orientations, EMI from primary level in rural areas can be introduced and practiced.

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