

Addressing the Challenges of Using Teaching Aids in Primary School Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

An aid refers to a tool, device, or object essential for carrying out a task. A teaching aid is specifically used for instructional purposes in the classroom. This study sought to identify and examine the particular challenges teachers face when using teaching aids in the classroom. A qualitative design and interview method were used to address the research questions. Data were gathered from ten purposively selected schools and a simple random sample of twenty teachers from those schools from Dhaka and Satkhira. In-depth, one-on-one interviews with primary teachers served as the primary data collection tool, and thematic analysis was employed. Ten themes emerged from the analysis. The findings indicate that, despite teachers' motivation to use teaching aids, they encounter multiple challenges. These challenges were grouped into two categories. Internal classroom challenges include teachers' reluctance, large class size, inadequate time management, limited ICT skills, heavy workload, and lack of lesson preparation. External challenges encompass poor storage systems, insufficient provision of suitable teaching aids, weak supervision and monitoring, inadequate school facilities and resources, and government policy. The study recommends strategies such as fostering a professional mindset, investing in teacher training, revising government policy on teaching aids, improving teacher recruitment, and enhancing supervision and monitoring.

Keywords: Teaching Aids, Primary Education, Classroom Challenges, Classroom Instruction

INTRODUCTION

Primary education is the foundation upon which all other levels of learning are built. It plays a vital role in shaping both individual lives and the overall progress of a nation. When this foundation is weak, it not only hampers personal development but also slows down a country's social and economic growth.

As Barber and Mourshed (2007) point out, "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers," and "the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction" (as cited in Scheerens, 2010). Likewise, Bruner (1966) explains learning as a process where teaching helps learners form patterns of ideas similar to those already held by the teacher. These ideas clearly show how central teachers are to the success of the education system.

In Bangladesh, the Directorate of Primary Education reports that there are about 322,766 public primary school teachers. They are required to complete a one-and-a-half-year pre-service program known as the Diploma in Primary Education (DipEd), which is conducted by Primary Teachers' Training Institutes (PTIs). Beyond this, various professional development programs are available. For instance, under the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-3), 58,752 head teachers have received training, 79,540 teachers have taken part in School Help Activity training, and 34,912 teachers along with 400 officials have been trained in ICT in Education. Teachers also receive subject-based and need-based in-service training.

However, despite these extensive training opportunities, concerns about the overall quality of teaching still remain. Many teachers find it difficult to apply what they learn in training to their real classroom situations. This gap between training and classroom practice creates an imbalance in the teaching-learning process and continues to challenge the quality of primary education in Bangladesh.

Research problem:

Challenges faced by primary school teachers in implementing teaching aids in their classroom.

Statement of the Problem

Primary education is considered the foundation of all levels of learning, and its quality largely depends on the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices in the classroom. Teaching aids are essential tools that help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical understanding, especially when students are introduced to abstract subjects like mathematics or science. Proper use of teaching aids enhances students' attention, motivation, and comprehension, contributing to more meaningful learning outcomes.

In Bangladesh, primary school teachers receive various forms of professional training aimed at improving classroom instruction, including programs on the effective use of teaching aids. These trainings are provided through the Diploma in Primary Education (DipEd) and other initiatives such as School Help Activity and ICT in Education under the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-3). Despite these initiatives, there remains a significant disparity between what teachers learn during training and what they actually practice in the classroom.

Many teachers either refrain from using teaching aids or fail to use them effectively. This reluctance may stem from multiple factors such as lack of resources, time constraints, inadequate institutional support, or limited motivation. As a result, the intended benefits of teaching aids are not fully realized in primary classrooms.

Phillips and Burbules (2000) emphasize that “research seeks to develop relevant true statements—ones that can serve to explain the situation that is of concern or that describe the causal relationships of interest.” Guided by this notion, the present study seeks to identify and explain the challenges that primary-level teachers face in using teaching aids in real classroom situations. Understanding these challenges will provide insights that can help policymakers, educational administrators, and teacher training institutions develop more practical and sustainable strategies to enhance the use of teaching aids in primary education.

Research Questions:

1. What are the challenges that faced by the teachers of primary schools in using teaching aids in classroom?
2. What are the reasons behind facing these problems?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching aids are essential tools used to enhance the teaching and learning process by making instruction more engaging, concrete, and understandable. The term aid refers to a tool, appliance, or object that supports the performance of a specific action. Therefore, a teaching aid is any aid used for instructional purposes within the classroom context.

Romiszowski (1968, p.11) postulates that “a teaching aid must, as the name suggests, aid the teaching of a topic. It does not do the whole job. Other methods perform parts of the job and the aid is administered and controlled by the teacher.” Teaching aids, therefore, serve as supplementary tools that represent or simulate reality to support understanding. They allow students to visualize and connect with abstract ideas through tangible examples. For instance, rather than using a real wall clock to teach the concept of time, a teacher may use a cardboard model with movable hands. Such aids help students reason, explore, and make deductions independently, while stimulating their curiosity and desire to learn.

Similarly, Szendrei (1996) defines teaching and learning aids as concrete materials—real-life tools and artifacts commonly used in non-school settings—as well as artificial materials and games, including puzzles, that are specifically designed for educational purposes. According to Szendrei, the choice of concrete materials

largely depends on a school's educational philosophy and its understanding of how learners construct knowledge and develop conceptual understanding.

Lipinskienė (2001) extends this view by defining the educational environment as a dynamic teaching and learning space shaped by the educator and guided by educational goals, content, and methods that foster active engagement with learning materials. This highlights the importance of a supportive classroom environment in maximizing the benefits of teaching aids.

In Bangladesh, several studies have examined teacher preparation, training, and classroom practices in relation to instructional quality. Rashid and Ritu (2013), in their study *Teachers' Professional Preparation, Income, Job Satisfaction and Performance: An Exploratory Study*, found that the majority of primary teachers had received formal training, such as the Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) program. Their study collected data on teachers' backgrounds, teaching-learning practices, job satisfaction, and professional expectations, revealing that government and semi-government school teachers had greater access to professional training and facilities than their counterparts in other institutions.

Beyond training, teacher well-being also influences classroom effectiveness. Terada (2018) reported that elementary teachers in Missouri experience high levels of occupational stress, which negatively affects their physical and emotional health as well as students' learning outcomes. However, the study also noted that stress can be alleviated when schools provide adequate emotional and professional support to teachers.

Eison (2010) emphasized the importance of active learning strategies in creating excitement and engagement in classrooms. His research showed that stimulating curiosity and enthusiasm in learners enhances the quality of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, both teachers and students face barriers that limit the effectiveness of such strategies, including lack of resources and institutional support—issues also relevant to the context of Bangladesh.

Socioeconomic disparities further compound these challenges. Schools located in urban centers like Dhaka tend to be better resourced and have access to various teaching aids, whereas rural schools often face acute shortages of materials and even basic infrastructure such as electricity. A report by Sarker, Ohiduzzaman, Islam, and Hassan (2017) from the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) identified several barriers to the effective use of ICT and teaching aids, including insufficient training periods, lack of practice opportunities, unavailability or malfunction of equipment, and inadequate institutional support.

Dr. Md. Abdul Halim (2011), in his study *A Comparative Study of Mathematics Curriculum at Primary Level in Bangladesh and India (West Bengal)*, compared the objectives, content, and implementation of the mathematics curriculum between the two regions. Using document analysis, classroom observations, and surveys of teachers and academic supervisors, he found significant differences in curriculum objectives and content presentation. The study also highlighted persistent challenges in Bangladesh, such as large class sizes, low teacher-student ratios, limited contact hours, and inadequate skill development in mathematics. These factors collectively hinder the effective integration of teaching aids into classroom instruction.

Overall, the reviewed literature emphasizes that while teaching aids and teacher training are crucial for improving instructional quality, several interrelated factors—including limited resources, ineffective training practices, and institutional constraints—continue to obstruct their effective use in primary education. This study, therefore, builds on these insights to further explore the specific challenges that primary school teachers face in utilizing teaching aids within the Bangladeshi classroom context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study followed a **qualitative research approach** employing both purposive and simple random sampling methods. To fulfill the purpose of the study, an **interview-based design** was adopted, allowing for in-depth

exploration of the experiences and challenges faced by teachers. The main target population comprised **primary school teachers in Dhaka and Satkhira city**. The study aimed to identify the underlying causes of the imbalance between teachers' training and their actual classroom practices, as well as the problems they encounter in using teaching aids.

Interview

Kvale (1996, p.14), as cited in Cohen et al. (2000), defines an interview as “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest,” emphasizing the role of human interaction in knowledge production and the social situatedness of research data. Best (1982) also noted that interviews often surpass other data-gathering tools in depth and flexibility.

For this study, **one-on-one, in-depth interviews** were developed and conducted by the researcher. Interviews were used to collect detailed qualitative data from teachers regarding their use of teaching aids, the challenges they face, and the reasons behind these challenges. This method provided the opportunity for direct interaction, enabling the researcher to probe and clarify responses where necessary. As Raj (1984, p.176) stated, “The interview is a face-to-face interpersonal situation in which one person, the interviewer, asks a person being interviewed.” Interviews also allowed teachers to offer suggestions on how to overcome the challenges identified.

Sample and Sampling

A total of **ten public primary schools**, five from Dhaka city and five from Satkhira city were selected **purposively** to ensure relevance to the research focus. Within these schools, teachers were selected using **simple random sampling** to provide diverse perspectives. Only teachers teaching at the primary level were included in the study. This combination of purposive and random sampling ensured both targeted and representative data collection.

Research Tools

For qualitative data collection, **semi-structured interviews** were used as the main research tool. The interview questionnaire consisted of **open-ended questions** designed to encourage teachers to share their experiences freely. As Phillips and Burbules (2000) note, “Data, evidence, and rational considerations shape knowledge. In practice, the researcher collects information on instruments based on measures completed by participants or by observations recorded by the researcher.”

Qualitative research enables researchers to examine subjects in their natural environments and interpret their experiences accordingly (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Hence, this method was deemed appropriate for understanding teachers' real-life classroom practices and contextual challenges.

Population

According to Gay and Airasian (1996), population refers to the group of interest to a researcher to which study results are ideally generalized. In this study, the population consisted of **primary school teachers in Dhaka and Satkhira city**. The selection directly aligns with the study's objective to explore the challenges faced by these teachers in using teaching aids in their classrooms.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis involved **inspecting, categorizing, and interpreting** the qualitative data to draw meaningful insights. Hatch (2002) defines data analysis as “a process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modeling data with the goal of highlighting useful information, suggesting conclusions, and supporting decision making.”

The collected data were organized into **ten thematic categories**, following the framework of Lawson et al. (1976):

1. Teachers' understanding of teaching aids
2. Overload of work
3. Time management
4. Teachers' preparation for class
5. Conservation and maintenance of teaching aids
6. Supervision and monitoring
7. Large class size
8. Lack of appropriate teaching aids
9. Unavailability of school facilities and resources
10. Government policy

The analysis focused on identifying the **key challenges faced by primary school teachers** in implementing teaching aids effectively in their classrooms and understanding the contextual factors influencing these challenges.

Ethical consideration:

Data were collected only after obtaining formal permission from the relevant authorities. The researchers maintained strict confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. All participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the research before the interviews were conducted. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no teacher who declined to participate was included in the study.

During data collection, the researchers were physically present to conduct and monitor the interviews, ensuring that participants felt comfortable and respected. The names or identifying information of the participants were not recorded to protect their privacy. The researchers were transparent about the research process from the outset, disclosing any personal biases or interests that might influence the study. All data were analyzed as collected without any manipulation, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflected the participants' views and experiences.

Data Analysis

In this study, a **one-to-one in-depth interview method** was employed to collect qualitative data. A total of **twenty primary teachers**, selected randomly from **ten purposively chosen schools** in Satkhira city, participated in the interviews. After a careful review and interpretation of the collected data, the researchers developed several **key themes** based on the teachers' responses, opinions, and personal experiences. These themes reflect the teachers' understanding, perceptions, and challenges regarding the use of teaching aids in the classroom.

Teachers' Understanding of Teaching Aids

Most of the respondent teachers had received **pre-service or in-service training**, which provided them with a good understanding of teaching aids and their pedagogical benefits. Even the few who were relatively new to the profession and had not yet received formal training demonstrated a basic awareness of the concept and importance of teaching aids. The teachers commonly expressed that using teaching aids facilitates effective teaching and enhances student learning outcomes. Their insights are elaborated below through sub-themes that emerged from the data.

Long-Lasting Learning

A majority of teachers emphasized that teaching aids play a crucial role in promoting **meaningful and long-lasting learning**. They noted that such aids help students move beyond rote memorization toward real

understanding. When lessons are supported by visual or physical materials, students can grasp abstract ideas more concretely, leading to better retention of knowledge over time.

From Abstract to Concrete

Primary school students often struggle to comprehend abstract concepts due to their developmental stage. Teachers agreed that **concrete learning materials**—objects drawn from students' real-life surroundings—help bridge the gap between abstract textbook content and tangible experience. By linking real-world materials with classroom instruction, students can more easily relate to the subject matter. Teachers also observed that **colorful and creative teaching aids** attract students' attention and foster curiosity, making lessons more effective.

Grabbing Students' Attention

Teachers highlighted that maintaining the full attention of a large primary classroom is one of their greatest challenges. Young learners are naturally restless and easily distracted, particularly when lessons rely solely on lecture methods. Several teachers shared that **teaching aids help capture and sustain students' attention**, reducing disruptive behavior and keeping them focused on the lesson. The use of visuals, models, or hands-on materials makes the class more engaging and minimizes boredom.

Making Lessons Attractive

Many respondents mentioned that teaching aids transform ordinary lessons into **interesting and interactive learning experiences**. The presence of objects with different colors, shapes, and textures in the classroom sparks curiosity among students. Teachers observed that when lessons are visually appealing, students are more likely to participate actively and maintain interest throughout the class. Consequently, the learning environment becomes dynamic and student-centered.

Joyful Learning

Teachers consistently stated that **new and varied learning experiences** make lessons enjoyable for students. They observed that relying exclusively on lecture-based methods often causes disinterest and fatigue. Conversely, using a variety of teaching aids stimulates excitement and enjoyment in learning. When students find joy in the classroom, their motivation increases, and their learning becomes more meaningful and long-lasting. The teachers described this as the essence of "**joyful learning**."

Learning through Visual Experience

Several teachers pointed out that teaching aids provide students with opportunities to **learn through seeing**. Visual learning allows students to connect the teacher's verbal explanations with concrete examples, reinforcing comprehension. Teachers noted that visual stimuli, such as charts, models, and demonstrations, make lessons more memorable and help students develop a stronger grasp of the subject matter.

Easy and Effortless Learning

Teachers agreed that teaching aids significantly **simplify complex or abstract content**, making it easier for students to understand and remember. Visual and tactile aids help translate theoretical concepts into concrete experiences, thus making learning more accessible. As a result, students experience fewer difficulties in grasping lessons, and the overall learning process becomes smoother and more effective.

FINDINGS

A total of twenty primary school teachers were interviewed for this study. Among them, all but one held a

professional teaching degree. The findings reveal that teachers possess a clear understanding of teaching aids and acknowledge their importance in improving classroom learning. However, despite this awareness, most teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their actual use of teaching aids in classrooms due to various challenges.

Overload of Work

In the context of Bangladesh, primary teachers face numerous responsibilities beyond teaching, including exam evaluation, administrative duties, participation in public examinations, and training sessions. These additional workloads prevent teachers from focusing adequately on lesson preparation or effective use of teaching aids.

Respondents commonly cited excessive class pressure as the main obstacle. With five to six consecutive classes daily and minimal breaks, teachers often struggle to prepare adequately for each session. The heavy workload leads to fatigue, stress, and reduced enthusiasm, which in turn affects classroom performance and student engagement. As Herman et al. (2018) note, when teachers experience emotional exhaustion, it negatively impacts both their teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

Time Management Challenges

Ineffective time management was identified as another major issue. Data collected from ten schools showed that teachers often have no gap between classes, leaving no opportunity to organize materials or prepare teaching aids.

Additionally, the short duration of classes restricts teachers from managing roll calls, checking homework, and addressing individual students' needs—particularly in overcrowded classrooms. Respondents agreed that managing lessons, students, and teaching aids within limited time is extremely difficult. UNICEF (1993) similarly reported that Bangladesh has one of the lowest instructional hours in Asia—only 444 hours annually in grades I–II, compared to 1,100 in Indonesia and 1,235 in China. The findings of this study also align with Dr. Md. Abdul Halim's (2011) research on “low contact hours.” As Silva (2007) emphasized, improving the quality of instructional time is as crucial as increasing its quantity. Therefore, effective classroom time management remains a vital area for reform.

Large Class Size

Class size emerged as another major challenge. Teachers reported difficulty maintaining effective teaching-learning environments in overcrowded classrooms. This finding is consistent with Harmer (2005), who noted that large classes hinder both teaching efficiency and student participation. Similarly, Dr. Abdul Halim's comparative study between Bangladesh and West Bengal also found that the teacher–student ratio in Bangladesh is significantly higher, leading to decreased instructional quality.

Lack of Appropriate Teaching Aids

Teachers frequently mentioned the unavailability or insufficiency of appropriate teaching materials. This limitation restricts the use of active learning strategies, echoing Eison's (2010) findings that large class sizes and lack of instructional materials act as barriers to active learning. Pia (2015) also observed that inadequate teaching aids reduce student motivation and overall classroom engagement.

Government Policy and Institutional Factors

Findings also indicate systemic issues such as inadequate supervision, insufficient funding, and ineffective implementation of ICT initiatives. According to the NAPE report (Sarker et al., 2017), teachers often face

obstacles like insufficient training, lack of functioning ICT equipment, and inadequate institutional support. These problems directly affect teachers' ability to integrate teaching aids effectively into classroom practice.

Limitations of the study

The primary limitation of this study is the **small sample size**. Only a limited number of primary teachers were selected due to financial constraints and time limitations. Additionally, the study was confined to a single administrative division in Bangladesh, which restricts the **scope and generalizability** of the findings. Therefore, while the results provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by primary teachers in using teaching aids, they should be interpreted with caution, as they may not fully represent the broader population of primary school teachers across the country.

Implications

Teacher's Professional Mindset

The study reveals that primary teachers possess knowledge about teaching aids, their benefits, and methods of use. They are also aware of their professional responsibilities; however, many fail to implement all aspects of their duties fully, sometimes intentionally neglecting certain tasks. Teachers should cultivate a **committed and professional mindset**, prioritizing their core responsibilities over opportunistic or convenience-based practices. Developing such dedication is essential for improving classroom teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Educational Institutions' Support and Cohabitation

Educational institutions play a crucial role in supporting teachers. School authorities must recognize the complexities teachers face in managing classroom teaching and learning processes. Institutions should actively **identify challenges** through supervision, monitoring, and individual discussions with teachers. Collaborative problem-solving and targeted support can empower teachers to implement teaching aids effectively and create a more engaging and productive learning environment.

Government Policy

The government must ensure **equitable policies** across all sectors of education, addressing disparities between rural and urban schools. Policies related to teacher training, post-training skill assessment, provision of teaching-learning resources, and supplementary support require regular review. Implementing **need-based, context-specific policy measures** can significantly enhance teacher performance and facilitate the effective use of teaching aids in classrooms.

Future Research

While this study identifies key challenges, including professional negligence, inadequate teaching aids, poor time management, limited school facilities, and insufficient policy support, it does not focus in-depth on specific areas such as teacher training quality, classroom instructional strategies, school infrastructure, or policy implementation. Future research should explore these dimensions separately, with larger and more diverse samples, to provide actionable insights for improving teaching aid integration and overall primary education quality in Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION

Teaching aids play a crucial role in enhancing classroom learning by creating a visual, interactive, and engaging environment for students. They help reduce monotony, clarify complex concepts, and provide direct, hands-on experience, which ultimately promotes active participation and sustained attention throughout the lesson.

In Bangladesh, primary school teachers face multiple challenges in effectively implementing teaching aids, including workload pressures, time constraints, inadequate resources, and limited institutional and policy support. When used properly, teaching aids can significantly improve learning outcomes and help achieve lesson objectives. To ensure their effective use, teachers need to plan and utilize available resources efficiently, school authorities should provide consistent support, and the government must review and adapt policies to address gaps in training, resources, and classroom conditions.

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