

Unresolved Cliches in EFL Classrooms: Stigma or Pathos

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Abstract: Unresolved cliches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms continue to pose significant challenges in Bangladeshi secondary education. These issues, including rote memorization, a rigid focus on grammar translation, and a test-oriented learning culture, limit students' creativity, engagement, and critical thinking. This study investigates the persistence of these cliches and their impact on both teachers and students. Through qualitative methods, including interviews and focus group discussions with secondary school teachers and educational experts in Sylhet, the research identifies several key barriers, such as limited speaking practice, over-dependence on textbooks, and a fear of making mistakes. The findings reveal that teacher-centered approaches and outdated methodologies prevent students from developing practical language skills. Additionally, systemic issues like insufficient teacher training, lack of classroom resources, and socioeconomic disparities further reinforce these cliches. The study emphasizes the need for pedagogical reforms, advocating for communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and the integration of real-world contexts in instruction. To improve English education in Bangladesh, the research suggests shifting towards interactive and student-centered learning approaches, incorporating diverse teaching materials, and reforming assessment methods to prioritize practical language use. Addressing these challenges can create a more effective and engaging EFL learning environment, equipping students with the necessary skills for academic and professional success.

Keywords: EFL education, teaching methods, rote memorization, communicative learning, student engagement, Bangladesh.

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I. Introduction

Unresolved cliches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms present ongoing challenges in Bangladeshi secondary education. English proficiency has become increasingly important in today's globalized world, making EFL classrooms essential for equipping students with vital language skills. However, the over-reliance on outdated teaching methods, rigid instructional approaches, and repetitive expressions often hinders effective language learning (Rahman, 2019). Traditional teaching practices in Bangladesh, characterized by rote memorization and teacher-centered approaches, contribute to the persistence of cliches in the classroom. These methods often limit students' engagement, creativity, and critical thinking, impeding their ability to acquire practical language skills (Hossain, 2020). At the same time, teachers face systemic challenges, including limited access to professional development and inadequate resources, which restrict their ability to adopt innovative approaches (Ahmed & Sultana, 2021).

The issue extends beyond pedagogy, as unresolved cliches can reinforce stigma among students unable to conform to rigid norms, leading to feelings of exclusion or inadequacy. Emotional responses such as frustration

and disengagement further highlight the complexity of this problem (Chowdhury & Karim, 2018). Additionally, factors such as gender, socioeconomic background, and regional disparities influence how students and teachers perceive and experience these cliches (Rahman, 2019). This research examines the origins and implications of unresolved cliches in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms, aiming to provide insights into fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment. By addressing these issues, the study hopes to contribute to meaningful improvements in teaching and learning practices meanwhile the study aims to address the following questions:

- a. How do unresolved cliches in EFL classrooms affect teaching and learning, particularly students' creativity, engagement, and critical thinking?
- b. What are the most common unresolved cliches in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms, why do they persist, and how do they impact students and teachers emotionally?
- c. How do teachers address or integrate cliches in EFL instruction, and how do gender, socioeconomic background, and regional differences influence their effectiveness?

Unresolved cliches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms pose a significant challenge to the effectiveness of Bangladeshi secondary education. These cliches, such as repetitive phrases, rigid teaching methods, and outdated practices, can hinder students' ability to develop critical language skills, creativity, and critical thinking. As the importance of English proficiency continues to grow for academic and professional success, addressing these issues becomes essential to improving the quality of language education (Ahmed & Farzana, 2020). The persistence of these cliches not only discourages meaningful learning but also fosters reliance on rote memorization, leaving many students feeling disengaged and stigmatized when they struggle to meet conventional expectations. Teachers also face challenges, including insufficient professional development opportunities and limited access to resources, which perpetuate these practices (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). These systemic barriers underscore the need to explore the factors driving the persistence of cliches and their impact on both students and teachers. Socioeconomic background, regional differences, and gender dynamics further add complexity to the issue. These factors shape how students and teachers perceive and experience cliches in EFL classrooms, making it important to develop context-sensitive strategies for improvement (Khan & Akter, 2019).

Unresolved cliches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms significantly hinder effective learning in Bangladeshi secondary schools. These cliches, including repetitive language use, rigid instructional methods, and reliance on outdated teaching practices, limit students' ability to engage critically and creatively with the language. Despite the growing importance of English in academic and professional fields, traditional methods continue to dominate, resulting in disengagement and a focus on rote memorization rather than meaningful language acquisition (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). As a student of the Government Teachers' Training College in Sylhet, my observations align with research that highlights the persistence of conventional approaches in EFL classrooms. These methods often fail to address diverse student needs and create barriers to active participation and skill development (Hamid & Honan, 2012). Addressing these unresolved cliches is essential for improving the quality of English education in Bangladesh. This research is justified as it seeks to provide actionable insights into how unresolved cliches impact teaching and learning. By exploring teacher and student perspectives, it aims to identify practical strategies to enhance classroom practices, making them more inclusive and effective. The findings are expected to guide educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in adopting innovative and culturally responsive approaches to EFL instruction (Ali et al., 2018).

By examining how unresolved cliches affect both students and teachers, this research highlights the need for more innovative, student-centered teaching approaches. (Richards and Farrell 2005) emphasize the importance of reflective practices in language teaching, which can help educators identify and move beyond formulaic methods. Moreover, addressing the perceptions of teachers and students provides a more comprehensive understanding of how systemic factors contribute to these issues (Brown, 2001).

Defining Unresolved Cliches in EFL Classrooms

Unresolved cliches are characterized by an overreliance on fixed expressions, conventional methods, and teacher-centered approaches that limit opportunities for meaningful communication. (Thornbury. 2005) highlights that cliché in language instruction often arise from outdated pedagogies, creating barriers to linguistic creativity and authentic communication. Similarly, (Larsen-Freeman. 2000) notes that such practices are particularly prevalent in EFL classrooms, where emphasis on accuracy often overrides the need for fluency and critical engagement.

Impact on Student Learning and Creativity

Research shows that unresolved cliches hinder student engagement and creativity in language learning. (Richards and Rodgers. 2014) note that rote learning limits language use, while (Littlewood. 2018) argues that repetitive tasks reduce critical thinking. In Bangladesh, (Rahman and Pandian 2018) highlight factors like large class sizes and exam-driven teaching, which reinforce reliance on memorization over communicative skills.

Challenges Faced by Teachers and Learners

Teachers also face significant challenges in addressing unresolved cliches in classrooms. (Ali and Walker, 2014) point out that inadequate teacher training and limited access to resources often lead educators to rely on traditional methods that reinforce cliches. (Brown, 2007) argues that systemic issues, including lack of professional development opportunities, contribute to teachers' inability to adopt innovative and student-centered teaching methods. In Bangladesh, (Begum, 2019) notes that many teachers are constrained by rigid curricula and examination systems, which emphasize memorization over skill development. Teachers often struggle to balance the demands of the system with the need to create interactive and engaging learning environments.

EFL learners face numerous challenges in overcoming formulaic teaching methods and achieving language proficiency. One of the primary difficulties is the lack of opportunities for authentic language use (Richards, 2015). In many EFL settings, particularly in Bangladesh, students are confined to textbook-based learning, which limits their exposure to real-life conversations and contextual language use (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Another major challenge is anxiety and lack of confidence, which stem from an overemphasis on error correction and grammatical accuracy (Horwitz et al., 1986). Research indicates that fear of making mistakes discourages learners from actively engaging in speaking and writing activities (Young, 1991). This is particularly evident in traditional classrooms where assessments prioritize correct usage over communicative competence (Littlewood, 2018).

Additionally, social and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping students' experiences in EFL classrooms. In Bangladesh, gender-related barriers and societal expectations often hinder female students from participating fully in classroom discussions (Banu, 2017; Haque, 2020). Socioeconomic disparities also contribute to unequal access to quality education, further affecting language acquisition (Rahman, 2019).

Cultural and Socioeconomic Influences

The persistence of unresolved cliches is also influenced by cultural and socioeconomic factors. (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) emphasizes the importance of understanding the local educational context when addressing pedagogical challenges. In Bangladesh, disparities in access to resources and regional variations in education quality further complicate the issue (Rahman, 2019).

Gender dynamics also play a role, with studies indicating that female students in rural areas often face additional challenges due to societal expectations and limited opportunities for active participation in classrooms (Haque, 2020). These factors highlight the need for culturally sensitive approaches to addressing cliches in EFL classrooms.

Strategies for Addressing Unresolved Cliches

Several strategies have been proposed to reduce the prevalence of unresolved cliches in EFL classrooms. (Richards and Schmidt, 2010) suggest integrating Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to promote interaction and encourage students to use language in authentic contexts. (Nunan 2015) advocates for task-based learning, which focuses on engaging students in real-life tasks that require the use of language beyond memorized expressions.

In the Bangladeshi context, (Rahman and Pandian, 2018) recommend increasing teacher training programs to equip educators with the skills needed to implement innovative teaching strategies. Additionally, (Haque, 2020) suggests adapting teaching materials to reflect students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, making lessons more relatable and effective.

The literature highlights the pervasive impact of unresolved cliches in EFL classrooms, particularly in contexts like Bangladesh, where traditional teaching methods dominate. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes teacher training, curriculum reform, and the integration of interactive teaching methods. By understanding the cultural, socioeconomic, and systemic factors contributing to this issue, educators and policymakers can work toward creating more engaging and effective EFL classrooms.

II. Methodology

Research Design

The research adopts an exploratory design to identify and analyze the unresolved cliches present in EFL classrooms and their effects on teaching and learning. An exploratory design is ideal for uncovering the dynamics and complexities of educational practices, particularly in under-researched areas (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Study Area

The research focuses on secondary schools in Sylhet Division, Bangladesh. This region was chosen to provide a representative understanding of both urban and rural educational contexts in Bangladesh, highlighting socioeconomic and cultural diversity.

Sampling Method

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants. This non-probability method ensured the inclusion of teachers and students with diverse backgrounds and experiences relevant to EFL classrooms. A total of 8 participants were selected, including 6 teachers and 2 educational experts, ensuring gender and regional balance.

Data Collection Methods

1. Interviews: Interviews were conducted with teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of his perceptions and experiences. This method offered flexibility to explore emerging themes during the conversation, aligning with qualitative research principles (Bryman, 2016).

2. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs were organized with groups of teachers and educational expert to encourage dynamic discussions. FGDs are particularly useful for generating a range of ideas and identifying patterns of agreement or divergence among participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following (Braun and Clarke's 2006) six-step framework. This systematic approach helped identify, categorize, and interpret recurring themes, uncovering meaningful patterns relevant to the research questions.

Research Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, data triangulation was applied by combining interviews, and FGDs, allowing findings to be cross-verified. Reliability was maintained through consistent data collection and peer debriefing to minimize bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was used to confirm participants' responses.

The study adhered to ethical research practices, including:

- I. Informed Consent: Participants were informed about the study and provided consent.
 - II. Confidentiality: Identities remained anonymous, and data were securely stored.
 - III. Voluntary Participation: Participants could withdraw at any time without consequences.
- Ethical approval was obtained before data collection

III. Findings and Discussion

Interview Findings:

Using 12 question the interviews with four (TA, TB, TC, & TD) secondary school English teachers in Bangladesh reveal persistent issues in EFL classrooms due to unresolved teaching cliches. These challenges impact students' language proficiency and engagement, requiring a shift toward more effective teaching methods.

1. Dominance of the Grammar-Translation Method: Teachers still rely on the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), prioritizing rule memorization over communication.

TA stated: *"Students understand grammar but struggle to speak English fluently."*

TC added: *"Exams focus on translation, so speaking practice is neglected."*

2. Memorization Over Comprehension: Students memorize essays and model answers rather than developing understanding.

TB mentioned: *"Students memorize texts but cannot explain them in their own words."*

TD emphasized: *"Memorization limits creativity and critical thinking."*

3. Lack of Speaking Practice: Speaking skills are rarely practiced, making students hesitant to use English.

TA observed: *"Classroom activities do not involve enough real conversations."*

TC noted: *"Student's fear making mistakes and avoid speaking."*

4. Textbook Dependency: Teachers and students over-rely on textbooks, limiting exposure to real-world English.

TD said: *"Textbooks dominate lessons, leaving no room for interactive content."*

TB suggested: *"We should use videos, articles, and digital materials."*

5. Teacher-Centered Learning: Lecture-based teaching dominates classrooms, reducing student engagement.

TA commented: *"Students rarely participate in discussions."*

TC noted: *"Active learning methods should be prioritized."*

6. Fear of Making Mistakes: Students hesitate to speak freely due to fear of errors.

TB shared: *"Many students are afraid of being corrected in front of others."*

TD added: *"They should be encouraged to learn from mistakes."*

7. Overemphasis on Exams: Students focus on passing exams rather than acquiring language skills.

TA observed: *"English is treated as a subject to pass, not a skill to master."*

TC suggested: *"Exams should assess real-world language use."*

8. Neglect of Listening Skills: Listening is the least practiced skill in classrooms.

TB noted: *"Most lessons focus on reading and writing, ignoring listening."*

TD recommended: *"Audio-visual resources should be used more."*

9. Lack of Authentic Language Use: Students do not get enough real-life exposure to English.

TA mentioned: *"They only use English in the classroom."*

TC suggested: *"We should create more opportunities for real-world communication."*

10. Code-Switching Habit: Frequent switching to Bengali reduces full English immersion.

TD noted: *"Explaining in Bengali limits students' ability to think in English."*

TB recommended: *"Gradual transition to full-English instruction is necessary."*

Interview Discussion

To improve English language learning, it is essential to integrate a communicative approach alongside the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) to enhance speaking and listening skills. Encouraging analytical discussions and creative writing can help students move beyond rote memorization, allowing them to develop critical thinking and deeper comprehension. Activities such as role-plays, debates, and discussions can boost students' confidence and fluency by providing practical language practice. Additionally, incorporating multimedia tools, online resources, and real-world materials can create a more engaging and immersive learning experience. Group discussions, peer collaboration, and project-based activities can make lessons more interactive, fostering a student-centered learning environment. A supportive classroom atmosphere where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process can help students gain confidence and reduce their fear of using English. To shift the focus from exam-oriented learning to practical language use, speaking and listening assessments should be incorporated. Using resources like podcasts, recorded conversations, and interactive listening exercises can improve comprehension and expose students to different accents and speech patterns. English clubs, cultural exchange programs, and interactive tasks outside the classroom can encourage students to use the language naturally in various contexts. Establishing a structured English-speaking environment with visual aids and contextual learning materials can further support language development. By implementing these strategies, educators can foster a more effective, engaging, and student-friendly approach to English language learning, ensuring that students develop real-world communication skills with confidence.

FGD Findings:

This section presents key findings from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with two secondary school English teachers (T1 & T2) and two educational experts (E1 & E2). The discussion focused on unresolved cliches in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Bangladesh. Using 12 question the findings are categorized into six themes: teaching methods, the role of cliches, impact on learning, teachers' role, sociocultural factors, and suggestions for improvement.

1. Teaching Methods: Reliance on Traditional Approaches

The FGD revealed that traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation Method, still dominate EFL classrooms. Teachers rely heavily on textbook-based instruction, memorization, and teacher-centered lectures, leaving little room for creativity.

T1 stated: *"Many teachers focus on translation and grammar rules rather than communication skills."*

E1 added: *"Students memorize paragraphs and essays, limiting their ability to think independently."*

2. The Role of Cliches in EFL Learning

Participants agreed that cliches are common in English teaching, mainly to help students prepare for exams. However, over-reliance on them reduces flexibility and comprehension.

T2 observed: *"Students memorize common phrases without understanding their meaning."*

E2 argued: *"Cliches provide structure, but excessive use makes students passive learners."*

3. Impact of Cliches on Student Learning

A. Creativity and Critical Thinking: Participants agreed that memorization discourages creativity, preventing students from forming original ideas.

T1 noted: *"Students struggle to express their own thoughts because they rely on set phrases."*

E1 added: *"Exam's reward those who use cliches, discouraging independent thinking."*

B. Confidence and Speaking Skills: The fear of making mistakes discourages students from speaking or writing freely.

T2 explained: *"Students hesitate to use English in class, fearing they might say something wrong."*

E2 emphasized: *"This system makes students reluctant to communicate naturally."*

4. Teachers' Role and Challenges

Most teachers do not actively challenge cliches due to curriculum constraints and lack of training.

T1 stated: *"Teachers strictly follow textbooks because exams demand specific answers."*

T2 added: *"In rural areas, teachers have little access to modern training programs."*

E1 noted: *"Teacher training should focus on strategies to reduce dependence on cliches and encourage active learning."*

5. Sociocultural Factors Influencing Cliche Use

Socioeconomic background influences how students and teachers engage with English.

T1 observed: *"Urban students have more exposure to English, while rural students rely more on memorization."*

T2 stated: *“Parents and teachers in rural areas prioritize exam scores over communication skills.”*

Additionally, regional differences affect English learning, as students frequently switch between Bengali and English in classrooms.

E2 explained: *“Students think in Bengali and translate into English, affecting fluency.”*

6. Suggestions for Improvement

Participants recommended several strategies to reduce cliché dependence and enhance English learning.

More Interactive Teaching Methods:

T1 suggested: *“Activities like group discussions, debates, and role-playing can make learning more engaging.”*

E1 recommended: *“Teachers should incorporate storytelling and creative writing to encourage expression.”*

Incorporation of Real-World Contexts:

T2 stated: *“Lessons should include real-life conversations and multimedia resources.”*

E2 suggested: *“Students should watch English news, movies, and listen to podcasts.”*

Reforming the Assessment System:

E1 emphasized: *“Exams should test students’ ability to apply English in new contexts.”*

E2 proposed: *“Open-ended questions and oral assessments can improve language skills.”*

FGD Discussion

The findings reveal that an exam-focused approach in English classrooms encourages memorization rather than the actual development of language skills, with limited emphasis on listening and speaking. While repetitive learning patterns and formulaic responses may make learning easier, they also restrict students from constructing their own ideas and using English in meaningful, real-life situations. This suggests the need to create a classroom environment that nurtures creativity and allows students to take risks in language use without fear of mistakes. Additionally, the results highlight the importance of teacher training programs that promote interactive teaching strategies such as task-based learning and discussion-driven lessons. Without proper training, teachers may struggle to break away from outdated methods that prioritize rigid structures over dynamic engagement. Curriculum reforms must also address regional disparities by incorporating diverse learning materials that cater to different backgrounds and learning styles. A uniform curriculum often fails to meet the needs of students from various social and educational settings, creating barriers to effective language acquisition. Therefore, shifting towards a communicative, learner-centered approach can greatly improve student engagement, enhance creative thinking, and encourage the practical use of English beyond the classroom. By integrating discussion-based activities, real-life simulations, and collaborative learning, students can develop confidence and fluency in English. Focusing on interaction and real-world applications will ensure that students are not just learning for exams but gaining essential language skills that are useful in academic, professional, and everyday settings.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasize that unresolved clichés in EFL classrooms continue to be a major obstacle to effective language acquisition in Bangladeshi secondary schools. The heavy reliance on the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) results in a teaching approach that prioritizes memorization over practical communication skills. Consequently, students develop a limited ability to use English in real-life scenarios, particularly in speaking and listening. The pressure of exams further reinforces rote learning, discouraging creativity, independent thinking, and meaningful language application. The study also reveals that classrooms remain largely teacher-centered, offering students little opportunity to engage in interactive learning experiences. A significant issue identified in this study is the fear students have of making mistakes when using English, which hinders their confidence in both speaking and writing. This fear is often rooted in an educational culture that punishes errors rather than treating them as a natural aspect of learning. Additionally, the excessive dependence on textbooks and the lack of exposure to authentic language materials limit students’ ability to experience English as it is used in real-life situations. Furthermore, speaking and listening activities are rarely incorporated into lessons, contributing to poor oral proficiency among students. These findings highlight the importance of shifting towards a communicative, student-centered approach that fosters engagement, creativity, and practical language use.

To overcome these challenges, educators should integrate a variety of teaching strategies, including role-plays, debates, and group discussions, alongside GTM. Teacher training programs should focus on equipping educators with modern methodologies that promote interactive and engaging learning experiences. The inclusion of multimedia resources, diverse learning materials, and structured English-speaking environments can further enhance students’ exposure to the language.

A significant transformation in pedagogical approaches, curriculum structure, and assessment methods is necessary to improve the effectiveness of EFL instruction. Encouraging students to use English in real-life contexts, creating a supportive classroom environment, and promoting creativity can help bridge the gap between

theoretical knowledge and practical language use. By moving beyond outdated teaching clichés and adopting innovative strategies, English education in Bangladesh can be reformed to provide students with valuable skills that extend beyond the classroom and into their academic, professional, and social lives.

Recommendation

To improve English language teaching in Bangladeshi secondary schools, it is crucial to move beyond traditional teaching methods and clichés that limit students' language proficiency, creativity, and confidence. The following recommendations highlight essential changes that can enhance the overall learning experience.

- 1) Promote Communicative Language Teaching.
- 2) Reduce Memorization and Encourage Critical Thinking.
- 3) Improve Teacher Training and Development.
- 4) Reform Assessment Methods.
- 5) Encourage a Fear-Free Learning Environment.
- 6) Integrate Technology and Multimedia.
- 7) Address Socioeconomic and Regional Challenges.

By moving away from outdated clichés, incorporating interactive teaching methods, improving assessments, and fostering a supportive learning environment, English classrooms can become more effective. A collaborative effort from teachers, policymakers, and educational institutions is necessary to ensure long-term improvements in English education across Bangladesh.

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