

# Evaluation of English Conversation Program of Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB): A study

Md. Roni Mridha\*

Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB), Dhaka, Bangladesh.

## ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to evaluate the English conversation programme of Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) or commonly called "Vaab"-Bangladesh. This study is evaluated by mix-method and is quantitative in nature. The evaluation method and sample survey method was applied in this study. The study was evaluated in two stages, pre-and post. During pre-evaluation test, students got average marks of 58% mark. But after getting English conversation training, same students received average 83% marks. Average progress rate set upright on 26% and this progress rate of students is noteworthy. 20% students in this test shows outstanding progress and got 92% in post-evaluation test. The real impact of this training is highly satisfactory. In investigating the present status of students on the basis of sample survey, this study found that 49% student can speak fluently and 7% is very is in outstanding level. 64% student have a good command on ask and answering questions. Only 30% student have a good grasp on uses of standard pronunciation. 90% rural students have a better command on English grammar. 50% students are weak in narrating any aspect because of lack in sentences connecting ability. Some recommendations are made on the basis of this study result. To develop this training programme, trainer must be trained properly. Principle of self-dignity must be maintained. This type of training is novel programme for establishing a strong basement in English of students from school level. The impact of this training and educational programme is sustainable and can uphold the image to world.

**Key Words:** Conversation, evaluation, training, progress.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language and had copious importance in everyday life for most countries. English is set as standard language for major communication amongst different originated people cross the world [1]. If a person

travels from the non-English speaking country to another country, they may face difficulty in communication [2-3]. For standing at global level English is made compulsory at educational level. The role of English language has enhanced globally, and it demands the native nations to

stand by it. This has caused threat to cultural recolonization of developing countries like Bangladesh [4-5]. In secondary level of education in Bangladesh, both teachers and students took emphasis on English. Apart from school level English education, students are getting rich collection of lectures related to their study via internet. The main aim of providing English language exposure is, that after completing their institutional education the student can find suitable job in a multinational company.

For development of English conversational skill, student must be trained since school level. The memory and conception level of students exposed to English language is quite sharp and are able to catch English conversation skill training easily. English conversation training also helps in building the base for the speaking skill [6-7].

In Bangladesh, English is mainly taught and learnt academically in the classroom. So, classroom is the one and only option for most of the school and college students to learn English. As per reports only 18% people were fluent English speaker by the year 2009[8].The students have to attend various academic lessons, and spend the time in other curriculum activities [9-10]. This system does not provide sufficient English knowledge and skill development in the students. As they tend to read the English only as a subject for exams and not for career and personal growth [11]. With this kind of attitude, how much do the students use and learn English in the classroom? This is a big question to the people who are working in the related field and to those who are working to

resolve the challenges or the problems that inhibit them from speaking English [10, 12].

The students belonging to higher family income background were more likely to good English proficiency at school level [13]. In Bangladesh the status of English language education explores the educational policy outcomes. It hinders the quality teaching English language in Bangladesh by various ways [14]. English conversation training is operating by lots of organization and Volunteers association for Bangladesh (VAB) is one of them. VAB have their own training programme and started providing it in rural Bangladesh to make student more efficient, skill and expert in English. It is important to know the success and progress rate of these provided trainings for people. The main justification of our study is to find the real impact of training and provide some recommendation for the betterment of these programs. This training will also create a scope for farther research and data of this study will work as baseline. Thus, the present study will focus on the rural school going students and the students trained by expert trainers of VAB.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The principle objective of this study is to investigate the real impact of English conversation program of VAB at rural high school of Bangladesh. Beside this general objective there were some specific objectives that has guided the entire study.

The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- a. To assess student's progress in:

- i. Level of fluency in speaking
  - ii. Ability to ask and answer questions
  - iii. Use of Standard English Pronunciation
  - iv. Application of Appropriate Grammar
  - v. Ability to Narrate and Discussion
  - vi. Capacity in Learning through Repetition
- b. To investigate present status of students on English conversation skills; and
- c. To make some recommendations for the advancement of English conversation programme of VAB.

### 3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study is quantitative in nature as pre and post Evaluation method was used for the study. This methods provides feedback to the researcher by measuring the initial knowledge and what knowledge the learner gained from the workshop or training. Randomly selected ten respondents were tested before providing the training and their analysis was done after completion of the training. About 30 samples were selected for survey, conducted for this study to know the present status of the students who already got this training.

All the clusters of Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) had been selected as the area of this study. VAB clusters were covered Jashore, Kurigram, Nilphamary, Pabna, Satkhira and Cumilla district of Bangladesh. In this study all the students under the English Conversation Training Programme of VAB had been considered as population and every students of this program is unit of analysis.

Simple random sampling had been selected as sampling method of this study. A strong

evaluation test questionnaire were prepared to investigate the real impact of English conversation training. Evaluation test methods find the marks from the students before and after the training programme. One Focus Group Discussions with trainers were conducted to make the present study more valid. A standard FDG checklist was prepared for conducting FDG.

Total of 3 objectives were chosen and on the basis of study objective, 2 different method has been selected for evaluation (table 1). Evaluation Test Questionnaire for before and after evaluation and interview questionnaire for survey used as data collection tools. Focus group discussion used in this study as a data collection method only for getting opinion from the trainers.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result of this study is arranged on the basis of the objective described in the study. Questionnaire contents for pre and post evaluation and sample survey are considered in presenting study data and analysis.

#### 4.1 General Demographic Information

Demographics is the study of a population based on factors such as age, race, and sex. Demographic data refers to socio-economic information expressed statistically, also including employment, education, income, marriage rates, birth and death rates and more factors. But here the present study presented the sex, Class, subject and aim in life information. Respondents name and age is not presented here because of ethical aspect of privacy.

#### 4.1.1 Gender of Students

Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex, sex-based social structures (i.e., gender roles), or gender identity. Most cultures use a gender binary, having two genders (male and female) and this study found data on both.

Out of 100 %, about 73% of the respondents are female and 27% are male. The selection of the gender of this study was determined by the population and sample part of the methodology. It was observed that female students are very interested in the English conversation training.

This study found that students had keen interest in English. It is definitely a scoring subject which makes it even more special for students. Average student who does not take much interest in Science, they manage to get decent marks in the subjects, but in English, students score well. English provide them the creative liberty to speak their minds out. In English, we can compose our own answers based on our understanding and intelligence. Additionally, English teachers are usually more approachable and understanding. The English teacher takes time to make them understand each phrase. They allow the students to interpret it as per their intellect. This empowers the rural students too so they can put their own thinking in it.

#### 4.1.2 Favourite Subject of Students

The English subject was chosen as most favourite subject with 60 percent of the vote,

<b>Table 1. Methodology of the study</b>				
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Data Collection Techniques</b>	<b>Data Collection Tools</b>	<b>Respondents/Sample size</b>
Access students' progress	Pre and post evaluation	Evaluation Test	Evaluation Test Questionnaire	10
Investigate present status of students	Sample Survey	Interviews	Interviews Questionnaire	30
Know opinion and make recommendations	Sample Survey	Interview and Focus Group Discussion	Interviews Questionnaire and FGD checklist	30 & 8
<b>Table 2. Aim in Life of the students</b>				
<b>Aim in life</b>	<b>Frequency Distribution Variables (FDV)</b>			
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Cumulative Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	
Doctor	12	12	40	
Engineer	3	15	10	
Teacher	8	23	27	
Farmer	0	23	0	
Business	0	23	0	
Public Service (BCS)	4	27	13	
Not Defined	3	30	10	
Total	30	30	100	

**Table 3. Evaluation Test Marks Analysis**

Respondents	Test Marks				Progress	Impact of Training
	Before(out of 60)	After(60)	Before (%)	After (%)		
1	35	46	58%	77%	18%	Positive
2	36	47	60%	78%	18%	Positive
3	38	52	63%	87%	23%	Highly Positive
4	36	55	60%	92%	32%	Remarkable
5	38	55	63%	92%	28%	Highly Positive
6	36	52	60%	87%	27%	Highly Positive
7	31	46	52%	77%	25%	Highly Positive
8	34	50	57%	83%	27%	Highly Positive
9	27	44	45%	73%	28%	Highly Positive
10	34	51	57%	85%	28%	Highly Positive
Average	34.5	49.8	58%	83%	26%	

**Table 4. Fluency Level of Students**

Level	Frequency Distribution Variables (FDV)		
	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage
Very Low	5	5	16.5
Low	8	13	27
High	14	27	46
Very High	1	28	3
Outstanding	2	30	7
Total	30	30	100

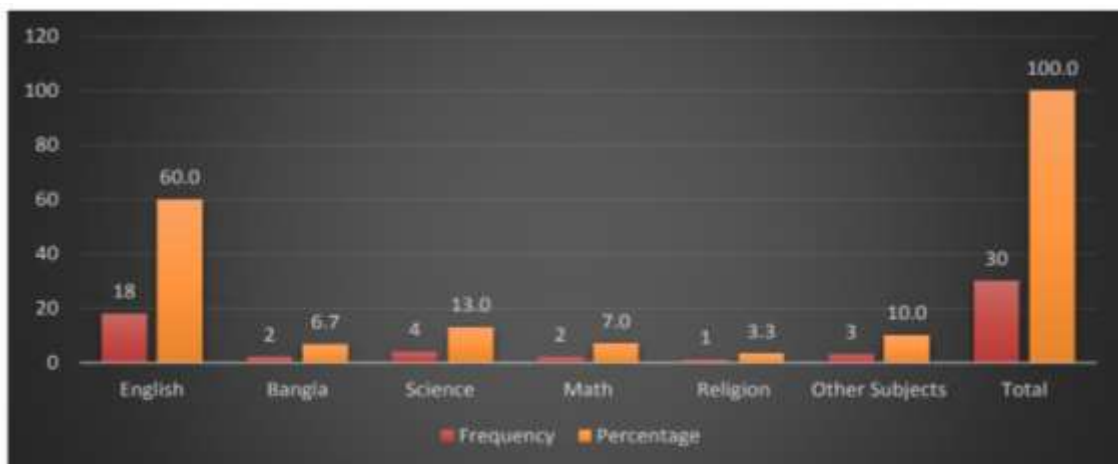
**Table 5. Fluency Level of Students**

Level	Frequency Distribution Variables (FDV)		
	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	Percentage
Very Low	1	1	3
Low	2	3	7
High	18	21	60
Very High	6	27	20
Outstanding	3	30	10
Total	30	30	100

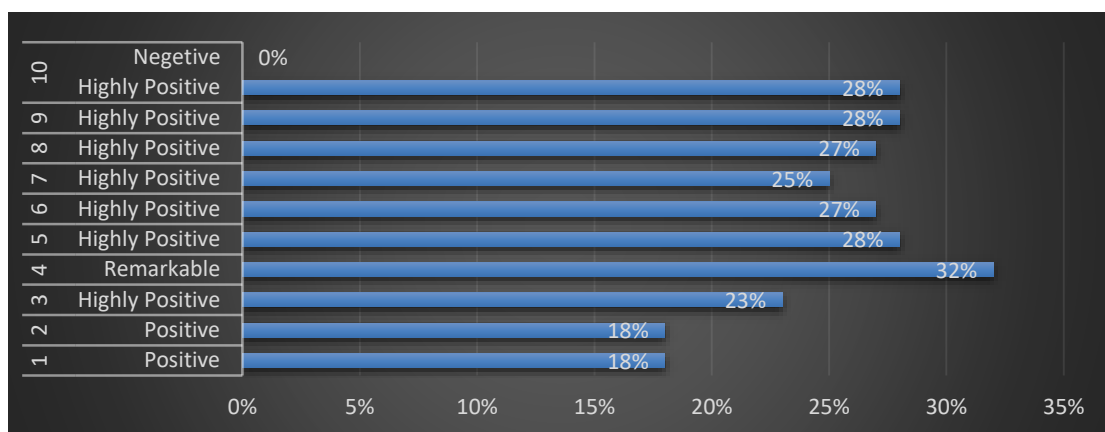
followed by science at 13 percent and Bangla at 7 percent. It need to be noted that the students who liked and have interest in other subjects like science and math, also chose English as their favourite subject.

#### 4.1.3 Future prospect of the Students

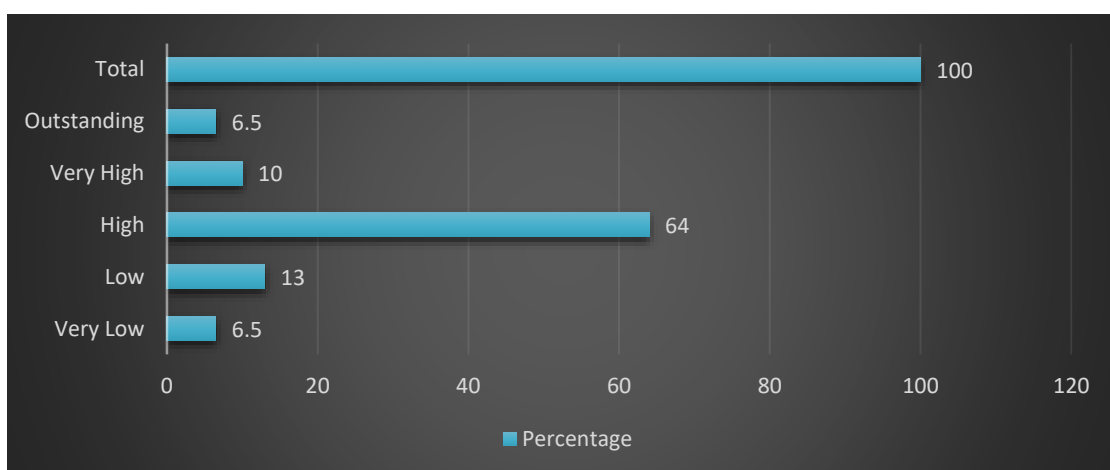
In rural Bangladesh, most of the family want to make their child professional like doctor or engineer without thinking about their aim/interest in life. This idea creates a mind set for student and urges them to choose the respective subject for their successful career. In most cases one kind finds their aim in life is



**Fig 1. Favourite Subject of Students**



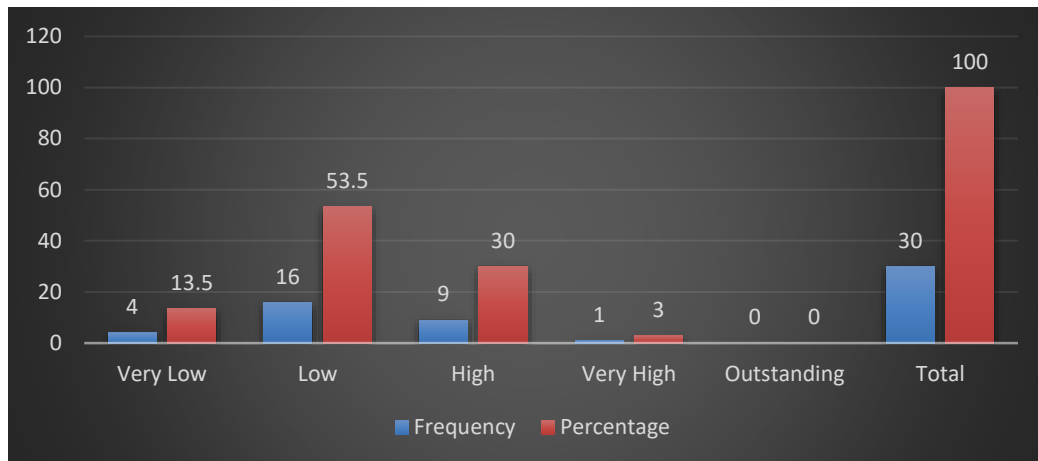
**Fig 2. Progress of Students**



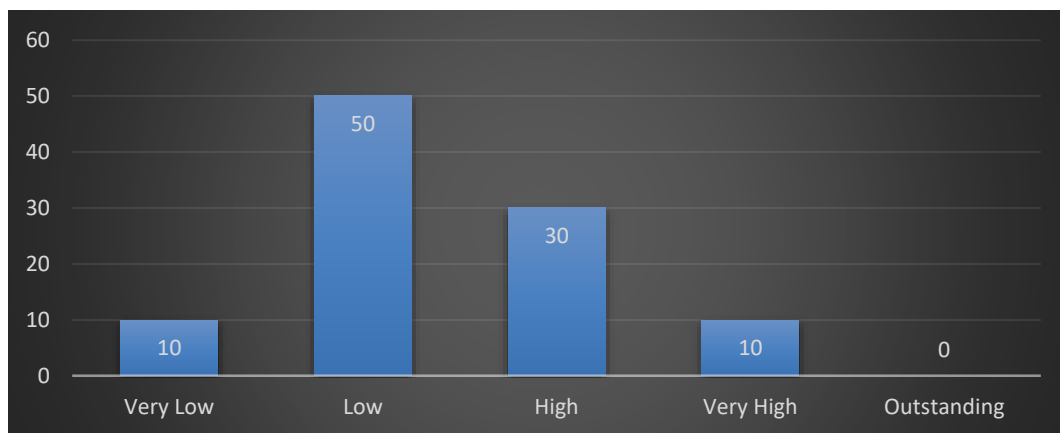
**Fig 3. Ability in Ask and Answering**

doctor, engineer, teacher or farmer. About 40%, 10%, 27% and 13% of students aimed to become Doctor, engineer, teacher, public service

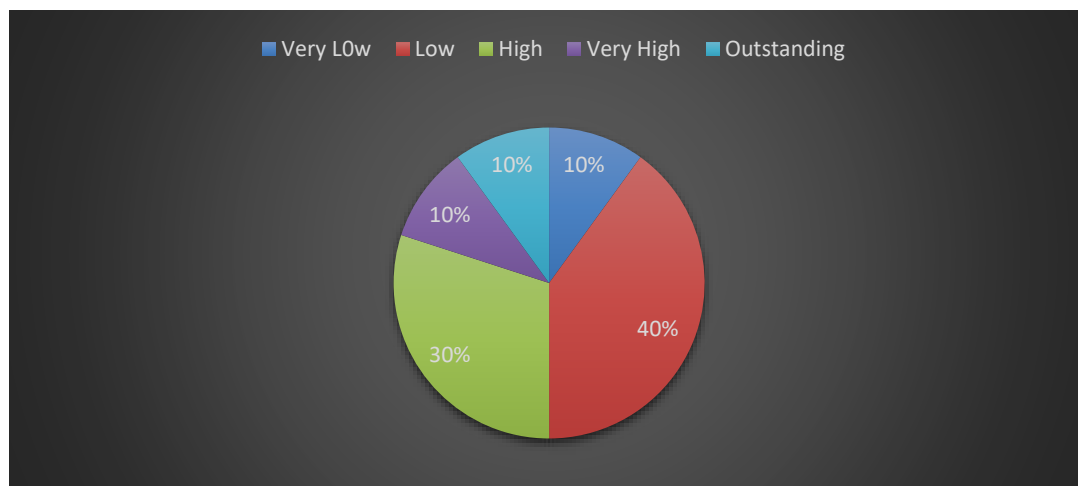
officer respectively (table 2). Students choose to opt these professional career rather than other odds and risk taking works. It was an open



**Fig 4. Use of (Standard) Pronunciation**



**Fig 5. Narrate and Discussion**



**Fig 6. Learning through Repetition**

ended question and no one choose pilot, scientist and other challenging carrier. It may be happened because of their lack of knowledge

about career and proper information about future plans.

#### 4.2 Progress of the Students with training program (Before and After Evaluation)

Evaluation was made on 6 different topics. The questionnaire were-Fluency in speaking; Ask and answering questions; English Pronunciation; English Language Skill; Narrate and Discussion (on any topic);Illustration and Learning through repetition. The data was made on the basis of percentage and difference between before and after test (table 3).

The average difference between the pre-test and post-test is 26%. It need to be noted that students have a minimum English Language Skill background and on the basis of the background some student do better in pre-test (table 3, Fig. 2).

No students were found with zero background in English language skill. So after considering their average background knowledge/skills, the evaluation shows progress rate or success rate of this programme is 26%. From 10 respondents about 7 have highly changed after receiving the training of VAB English Conversation Program. About 2 students have changed positively and 1 student performed outstanding. Every single student show good result compared to their earlier performance. Their progress percentage range is from 23 to 28% that is brilliant success of this programme. One student received remarkable progress of 32%. Those progress between the pre-test and post-test justify the VAB training programme, which is highly effective and the result oriented for the development of rural student in English conversation.

#### 4.3 Post training status of the Students

The present study found that the rural students have performed in English skills after getting the English conversation training from VAB. The analysis and discussion was made on the basis of Fluency in speaking; asking and answering questions; word pronunciation; English language skill; Narration and discussion (on various topics), Learning through repetition and considering some other issues. (table and Fig. ). In several studies it is observed that people are interested in learning english and standardize globally [15]

##### 4.3.1 Level of Fluency in Speaking:

Fluency is a speech language term that means the smoothness or stream with which sounds, syllables, words and phrases are joined together when speaking quickly. Language fluency is used informally to denote a high level of language proficiency, whereby language use if smooth and flowing, as opposed to slow and halted. When it comes to communicating in more than one language fluency is certainly desirable, but it is not essential for communication to take place. You can communicate with a native speaker if you have only a minor proficiency in English, but being really fluent in the language offers many advantages [16-17].

About 17% rural students are very slow in speaking English followed by 27% students. 46% student can speak fluently whereas 3% - 7% students have outstanding command on language. 56% rural students can speak fluently in rural school after getting the training of VAB (table 4, Fig. 2).

##### 4.3.2 Asking and Answering Questions:



Study found that asking question is more difficult than answering question. Most of the students in the secondary level are quite weak in asking question in English but they can answer questions. Students in rural high school are habited to answer question from any passage. They are not strong in making logical reply to any question. Sometime they answer without understanding the real meaning of question. After getting the training from VAB, they are now able to ask and frame some questions.

About 7% of rural students are very low ability in asking and answering questions followed by 13% student. 64% students have a good command on asking and answering questions whereas 6%- 10% have very high and outstanding level. 71% rural students can ask and answer questions from any passage or paragraph even from a sentence (Fig. 3). VAB English conversation programme took emphasis on this aspect because asking and answering question is the pre-requisite for any conversation. Success of VAB is signifying in this aspect. VAB made the trainees stronger in ask and answering questions.

#### 4.3.3 Use of Standard English Pronunciation

Students in the rural Bangladesh are not able to use Standard English pronunciation whereas the urban students use standard pronunciation much better. The students usually do not interact with any English speaking personnel in regular schedule due to their life style. This apparently lead to poor speaking and pronunciation skills [18]. The students exposed to both electronic and print media may have an authentic picture of the language

About 13% of rural students are weak in using standard pronunciation whereas 30% of students have a good grasp on the use of standard pronunciation and 3% of students have outstanding level (Fig. 4). In this aspect the progress level is quite low. As we know English is not a phonetic language, often a letter does not correspond to only one sound. As a result, it's extremely challenging to learn the pronunciation of a word simply from its spelling. There are several cases when a letter almost always corresponds with one sound, we must remember the thumb rule we learned in elementary school Phonics, "There is an exception to every rule." More attention must be given on this aspect.

#### 4.3.4 Application of appropriate grammar

Grammar is important because it is the language that makes it possible for us to talk. Grammar is essential for the formation of sentences. But to discuss about how the sentences are formed, the idea about the types of words and word groups. And knowing about grammar, offers a window into the human mind and into our amazingly complex mental capacity [19]. Students in the secondary school are quite average in grammar part. In every class they have to learn grammar as basic subject. About 3% rural students have weak English grammar skills. 60% student have a good command on ask and answering questions and 20% and 10% is very high and outstanding level. 90% rural students have a better command on English grammar (table 5). English Grammar is also their compulsory subject in every class. VAB English conversation programme took emphasis on this aspect because an English grammar skill is the pre-requisite for any smart conversation. Success of

VAB is remarkable in this aspect. VAB made the trainees stronger in building skill on English grammar.

#### 4.4.5 Narrate and Discussion (on various topic)

Narrate and discussion is very important aspect of conversation training. This aspect makes the sense of sentence connection and logic building.

About 50% of students are weak in narrating due to lack of sentences connecting power. 30% do better in narrating on Pohela Boishakhi Mela and their class room (Fig. 5). For narration of any topic, a student needs to visualize the entire picture and form appropriate sentence.

#### 4.3.6 Learning through Repetition

Repetition is a key learning aid because it helps transition a skill from the conscious to the subconscious. Through repetition, practice and rehearsal over the time, gradually becomes easier. Another important factor in learning is the ability to make connections to previously learned knowledge.

About 40% students are weak in it whereas 30% students have good practice. 50% students are up to high level in the aspect of learning through Repetition (Fig. 6).

#### 4.6: Findings from Focus Group Discussion

In Bangladesh, English language education has been problematic since ages, despite the efforts initiated by various reforms [20]. The reason maybe trainer's attitude or lack of awareness created by them. Trainers of the VAB English Conversation programme are very efficient and expert, mainly trainers do it voluntarily as they called them Volunteers not trainers. Most of the

volunteers are University students who have good command on English language. They have a good aspiration to make rural students better in English conversation. Volunteers expressed that Student's satisfaction is important and all volunteers maintain the principle of self-respect. The present study found that it is win-win situation work. Volunteers are happy and getting lot of experiences in developing rural education. Volunteers confirmed that the most of the students are so much co-operative. Volunteers also show a polite and friendly behaviour towards the rural students. Students had a huge effort for learning within their limited resources. Volunteers are overwhelmed by observing their thirst for knowledge from different parts of Bangladesh. Students get a lot of support from family especially during COVID-19. Students are getting access to mobile phone for participating in this programme [21].

### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are mainly made on the basis of respondent opinion. FGDs opinion outcomes also enrich it. Students are highly satisfied with the duration, style, contents and way of teaching. Some opinion is given by the students and some from volunteers. The following recommendation can make the English conversation programme of VAB more result oriented and outcome driven.

1. Training session of this programme should be increased from 10 to 15. Trainers must ensure the proper involvement in the programme of students draining training.
2. Principle of student's self-determination and respect must be maintained appropriately. Rapport with the students

should don't alteration to personal relation. Friendly behaviour will be showed to students but not to be a friend.

3. Session topics defined by the VAB office should be maintained properly. Trainers may help students rarely in their academic subject (even English subject) but main focused will be on English conversation skill development.
4. This programme should emphasis more on the practice on English conversation. Practice based Home-work and assignment for the students should be given and regularly followed up.
5. Students should be given more time to speak and appreciate them after every conversation. Training time should be fixed on the basis of student's free time.
6. More volunteers and students should be engaged with this programme and final computation must be introduced for awarding best performer to make them inspired and motivated.
7. Pre-test and post-test evaluation system should be introduced to know the outcome of the programme. Neutrality and transparency must be maintain during evaluation test.
8. A complete database should be saved and kept. Volunteers would fill up a unified proforma and provide this to assigned officer from VAB.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Volunteers association for Bangladesh works to fill that gap and try to ensure provide quality training to rural students with free of cost. It may be wonder to someone that also provide all

kinds of English training materials like books, papers, pen and money. It is important to set a training agenda which grants the importance of adaptation of suitable method to improve speaking and recognizes the importance of its applicability in Bangladesh. The development of physical tools for institutions and the proper training to supply effective and efficient teacher should be ensured on special priority along with providing the necessary resources [21]. VAB English conversation training programme provide students a great opportunity. The focused Area of VAB is rural Bangladesh. The rural schools are still stuck on inculcating rote learning in its students. This has to change. VAB believed that every rural student has a fundamental right to a high quality education in a school located near his or her home [22]. To be sure, the goal of offering a English conversation training to each and every rural child is aspiring, but the VAB believes that it can be accomplished with firm analysis and solicitous policies backed up with a commitment to provide adequate funding for education. This result of the study shows the real impact of VAB programme in rural Bangladesh. The present study found that the positive impact of VAB education programme ensure quality education for all children in Bangladesh. This study hope that the positive impact of the VAB programme will inspire and that all lead to all children enjoying the educational success.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Honour and gratitude to Professor Jasimuz Zaman, Country Director at Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) and former Professor at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology . His enthusiasm,

inspiration, meticulous care, generosity was the main driving force of this study. His fruitful comments and insightful suggestions have been a crucial formative influence on the present study. Personnel from Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB) named Mohammad Abdul Alim Khan, Abual Kalam Azad, Arifur Rahaman also helped to make research work easier and always stood beside researcher in collecting data. Special thanks to Professor Dr. Goalam Rabbani (ISWR, DU), Professor Manzoor Ahmed and Professor Dara Shamsuddin for their guidance in conducting this study.

### 8. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest.

### 9. SOURCE/S OF FUNDING

No source of funding

### 10. REFERENCES

1. Hoque, Md Enamul (2009). English Language Teaching and Learning in Bangladesh. *Journal of EFL Education and Research* (JEFLER). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315696473\\_English\\_Language\\_Teaching\\_and\\_Learning\\_in\\_Bangladesh?](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315696473_English_Language_Teaching_and_Learning_in_Bangladesh?)
2. Hossen, Azad (2020). The Importance of Learning English Paragraph- for allstudents. Retrieved from <https://www.wikilogy.com/importance-of-learning-english-paragraph-essay/>
3. Clark, Gail (2016). The Importance of Conversation, Retrieved from <https://www.rossmanschool.org/blog/importance-conversation>
4. Rumnaz Imam, S. (2005). English as a global language and the question of nation-building education in Bangladesh. *Comparative education*, **41**(4), 471-486.
5. Rahman, M. M., Islam, M. S., Karim, A., Chowdhury, T. A., Rahman, M. M., Seraj, P. M. I., & Singh, M. K. M. (2019). English language teaching in Bangladesh today: Issues, outcomes and implications. *Language Testing in Asia*, **9**(1), 1-14.
6. Rahman, Mustafiz (2017) Secondary education: A long way to go, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka. Retrieved from: <https://www.thedailystar.net/education-employment/secondary-education-long-way-go-1366504>
7. Rahman, Z., Rahman, A. F. M. M., & Begum, M. K. (2015). Enhancement of students' English speaking in Bangladesh: theory and practices. *Manarat Int. Univ. Stud*, **5**(1), 127-136.
8. Obaidul Hamid, M. (2010). Globalisation, English for everyone and English teacher capacity: Language policy discourses and realities in Bangladesh. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, **11**(4), 289-310.
9. Basir, A. & Ferdousy, S. (2006). Problems and strategies of teaching English in large classes at universities in Bangladesh. *Stamford Journal of English*, **2**, 38-52.
10. Kabir, U. S. (2014). Challenges of speaking English in Bangladeshi classrooms (Doctoral dissertation, BRAC University).
11. Parvin, R. H., & Salam, S. F. (2015). The Effectiveness of Using Technology in English Language Classrooms in Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh. In *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education* (Vol. 2,

- No. 1, pp. 47-59). Lehigh University Library and Technology Services. 8A East Packer Avenue, Fairchild Martindale Library Room 514, Bethlehem, PA 18015.
12. Akbari, Z. (2015). Current challenges in teaching/learning English for EFL learners: The case of junior high school and high school. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199(August 2015), 394-401.
  13. Hamid, M. O. (2011). Socio-economic Characteristics and English Language Achievement in Rural Bangladesh. *Bangladesh E-journal of Sociology*, 8(2).
  14. Hamid, M. O., & Erling, E. J. (2016). English-in-education policy and planning in Bangladesh: A critical examination. In *English language education policy in Asia* (pp. 25-48). Springer, Cham.
  15. Erling, E., Seargeant, P., Solly, M., Chowdhury, Q. H., & Rahman, S. (2012). Attitudes to English as a language for international development in rural Bangladesh.
  16. Wil (n.d). The Important of English. Retrieved from: <https://englishlive.ef.com/blog/career-english/business-english-importance-fluency/>
  17. Greenbaum, Sidney and Gerald Nelson (2002). *An Introduction to English Grammar*, 2nd ed., Longman
  18. Rahman, S. (2005). Orientations and motivation in English language learning: A study of Bangladeshi students at undergraduate level. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(1), 29-55.
  19. Hasan, M. (2011, April 02). Condition of English in Bangladesh: Second Language or Foreign Language. *Daffodil International University Forum*. Retrieved from <http://forum.daffodilvarsity.edu.bd/index.php?topic=4122.0>
  20. Rahman, M. M., & Pandian, A. (2018). A critical investigation of English language teaching in Bangladesh: Unfulfilled expectations after two decades of communicative language teaching. *English Today*, 34(3), 43-49.
  21. Power, T., & Shrestha, P. (2010). Mobile technologies for (English) language learning: An exploration in the context of Bangladesh.
  22. Volunteers Association for Bangladesh (VAB). (2020). *Road to Learning English Language*. Dhaka, Bangladesh.