

BANGLADESHI TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ABOUT THE USE OF L₁ IN L₂ CLASSROOM

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Abstract: In Bangladesh, students and teachers have common advantage in terms of their L₁. Bangla, L₁ of Bangladesh is spoken all over the country and the standard form is mutually intelligible to all. ELT teachers can exploit the advantage to teach L₂. However, it depends a lot on the perception of the teachers and students about using L₁ in L₂ classroom as many stakeholders do not recognize the positive aspects of it. In this study I investigated what the Bangladeshi teachers' think about using L₁ in L₂ classroom including how they use that in their classrooms.

Keywords: Classroom management, ELT teachers' perception, L₁ in L₂ classroom, Relate with schema.

Introduction: Although it is perceived that use of L₁ in L₂ classroom is harmful but researches exhibit that judicious use of L₁ in L₂ classroom facilitates language learning. As Bangladesh is a predominantly monolingual country, there is an opportunity of using L₁ in L₂ classroom to enhance learning. However, it is highly related with the mindset of the teachers and students. Some study showed how teacher felt discomfort about using L₁ in L₂ classroom for some other barriers like the threat to the ability or efficiency of teacher.

Aim of the Research: There are cognitive, socio cultural and affective advantages of using L₁ in L₂ classroom. As L₁ language system is available in L₂ learners, teachers can utilize that for L₂ learning. In our country it has huge opportunities as our L₁ Bangla is mutually understandable among learners and teachers. I tried to find out how L₁ is being used in our classrooms and for which purposes. The way of using L₁ is also important for me as I try to explore whether teachers are using it consciously or not.

Motivation of the Research: The motivation about this topic came from one of my experiences during classes at university. I have found some teachers were totally depended on English and some use Bangla or L₁. There was always a question in my mind that why they use L₁ in the classroom and whether it was appropriate or not. I have seen students can reconstruct ideas or knowledge from L₁ to L₂. On the other hand, they comprehend well some complex elements in L₁. Later on, it came in my mind that this could be an interesting area to explore and get insight about our classroom practice.

Research Question: As L₁ in Bangladesh is mutually understandable among L₂ teachers and learners, I want to find out the ways of using it. In this research I want to explore the answers of research question about the use of L₁ in L₂ classroom,

1. What do Bangladeshi teachers' feel about the use of L₁ in L₂ classroom?

Literature Review: Since my research focuses on the role of L₁ in L₂ classroom, I am going to look at the

position of L₁ in L₂ classroom from a historical perspective; advantages of L₁ use and criticisms against it. Finally, in the context of Bangladesh, I will review the status of L₁ i.e., Bangla use in L₂ i.e., English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 5) stated that the need of Grammar-Translation method was 'to learn a language to read its literature'. Detailed analysis of grammar rules, translation from L₁ to L₂ and L₂ to L₁ was required in the classroom activity. So, the first ever known teaching method was bilingual. According to L. Sauveur (1826-1907) cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 11) 'a foreign language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner's native language if meaning conveyed directly through demonstration and action'. Therefore, the role of L₁ was totally ignored in this method to teach L₂ to the learners in the classroom. The Audiolingual Method of 1950 stressed more on structure than the meaning of L₂. So, the learner's achievement in understanding meaning was ignored. The use of L₁ in the classroom was not accepted in audiolingual method. As Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) stated that the native language of student's was forbidden in audiolingual method. Use of L₁ in L₂ classroom came back in Communicative approaches of 1960s. Because, if learners failure to understand L₂ sentences might cause ineffective communicative event. The use of L₁ should have some limits as Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) said that judicious use of the L₁ was acceptable where feasible. The representative amount of L₁ in L₂ classroom for judicious use was a critical issue. Different approaches, methods and techniques created different trends in post method era of L₂ teaching. The new research's influence on policy makers, innovative invention of technologies, learner centred classroom, the impact of diversity of language teaching in different parts of the world questioned whether we can predict the use of L₁ in L₂ classroom from a homogeneous view.

Research Methodology: My research objective is to investigate perceptions of L₁ in L₂ classroom. To meet

this objective, I have collected data from 2 sources. At first place classroom observation. In this phase I have observed natural English classes taken by teachers to find out how L₁ is in use and for what kind of purposes. Secondly, I took interviews of the English teachers to learn about their view and opinions. All data are analysed together to make a complete scenario about the use of L₁ in L₂ classrooms in Bangladesh. I have collected data from 3 classrooms and from 3 interviews of teachers. I dealt about teachers and students' perception about using L₁ in L₂ classroom. Qualitative approach was used to get the perception from different sources. According to Lacey and Leaf (2001, p.2) qualitative data analysis is good for answering questions of 'why', 'what' or 'how'. As I am investigating what Bangladeshi teachers' perception about using L₁ in L₂ classroom, why they perceive it and how they use it, I have selected qualitative data analysis technique. Focus group discussion is a kind of interview with a group of participants. Interviewer participates in the discussion to keep the participants on track of discussion Teachers' interview was taken to know about their standpoint about using L₁ in L₂ classroom. Observation is another means of collecting data without interacting with the participants. Classrooms were observed according to preset criteria to create a combined picture of the above data sources.

Participants: Teachers of English in Bangla medium school were selected for to participate in this research. However, the level of the students was in the same grade-8 and the average age of students was 13 to 14. They had 8 years of study of English.

Table 1: Basic information about the participants

Name (Pseudonyms)	Age	Education	Language Known
Tanjim	29	MA in English	Bangla, English
Mehrab	30	MA in English	Bangla, English
Fardin	30	MA in ELT	Bangla, English

Mehrab also had 40 students, but his classroom size is big. There was enough ventilation of air, sufficient light available in the class. There was no AC or backup power for the classroom. One CPU and Monitor were available in the class. 39 Students were present in Fardin's class. There was seating arrangements in pairs. Sufficient light, air, fan and digital aid were available. Tanjim had used pure grammar translation method to teach 'Idioms and Phrases'. Mehrab and Fardin also used this method to teach 'Narration' and 'Transformation'. Tanjim and

Mehrab had used nearly half of his lecture in L₁ in his class while Fardin used usually in the class.

Important Findings: All data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis where preference was given on the theme raised from data. There are 6 themes which emerged from thematic content analysis. These themes are presented here and later explained in discussion part.

1. Understanding the lesson: All the teachers had used L₁ to make their lesson comprehensible to the students. The demand is more to make classrooms effective and to establish successful communication by using L₁ in classroom. Fardin told in interview, I use Bengali this is not correct I compel to use Bengali compel to use otherwise the students will leave the class (.) If I start speaking English in class students will start to leave the class they will avoid of me. And I have seen one in which class the teachers teach them with few Bengali, they love the teacher very much. He is the popular teacher who can teach English in Bengali. Yes, he can teach us, he can make us understanding ... because they are not used to hearing English, teach [taught] in English. (Fardin, Interview) Fardin did not want to say that he uses L₁ in L₂ classroom, rather he describes some reasons like students urge for using L₁ in L₂ classroom their demand about using L₁ in class. Students love the teacher who can use L₁ in class. Likewise, the student's poor level of proficiency in L₂ compels teachers to use L₁ in the class. If they take classes in L₂ then students will not be motivated towards class. They might lose interest towards learning. Use of L₁ seems more effective than using L₂ exclusively as most of the students are from the Bangla medium background and teachers are supposed to make them understand certain lessons. Tanjim stated in an interview, 'they are from Bengali medium and their vernacular is Bengali and they have not possessed a lot of vocabulary. This is the main reason that's why I have to use Bengali in my class. (Tanjim, interview). Mehrab use it for teaching grammar. He mentioned, 'in English grammar classes I think we should use L₁ to make the rules and regulations easy for them. I have to use L₁ to make them easy and understandable [for the students] (Mehrab, Interview).

2. Positive attitude towards L₁: Teachers thought that both the languages are necessary for better teaching and learning. Teachers allowed students to use L₁ as they fail to produce in L₂. It seemed to be a strange question to ask as there was no limit of using L₁ in class.

3. Culture threat or identity threat: As teachers are using L₁ for better comprehensiveness of students, they told that they were not using L₁ to show respect towards learner's culture and Language. As Fardin

mentioned, 'No there's nothing like this where about ...' (Fardin, Interview)

4. The various purposes of using L1: Most teachers used L1 to manage a classroom. For example, during observation I have found, Tanjim said in Bangla 'Why are you speaking?', 'Don't you have a book?' etc.

5. Disadvantages of using L1: One teacher thought that if he use of L1 in class the L2 learning could be slower as he said, 'I hope and think if we use more and more L1 than the L2 learning will be decreased' (Mehrab, Interview)

6. Teacher's guilty feeling: Teachers also had a feeling of guilt when they had used L1 in the class. On the contrary they think their learners will not assume it as their lack of proficiency as they need to understand the lessons. Tanjim stated, 'I have degrees in English Language and Literature, yes I feel myself sometime guilty. Most of the students will never think so, very few, very few...' (Tanjim, Interview)

Discussion and conclusion: Atkinson (1987: 242) statement that there is belief that English can be only learned by speaking English is not found in this research. Phillipson's (1992: 195) claim about non native teacher's ability to understand the student's problem was found from the data. The use of L1 in the classroom is high as Duff and Polio (1990), found use of L1 ranging from 10% to 100% or Turnbull (2001) found the TL use in four Grade 9 core French classrooms ranged from 9% to 89%. I found students prefer L1 in class but also prefer judicious use. Schweers's (1999) statement that most of students and teachers are advocating for L1 in EFL classroom was found positively from the data. Both students and teachers prefer L1 in the classroom. All the

teachers responded positively that they had used L1 in the classroom for the purposes like to assist or scaffold, translation or transfer language, give guidance, to manage a classroom, remove mental pressure or cognitive loads, to save time, lower anxiety level of learners, relate with background knowledge or schema, negotiate meaning, clarify and express thoughts. However, I have seen very few of them during observation. No variation has been seen about their discomfort or comfort about using L1 in the classroom during observation. Again, no effort was seen about switching to L1 when they fail to continue in L2. In Fardin's class, students used L1 more than the teacher does. Both teachers and students are seemed to be habituated to the use of L1. Teachers were not aware of the positive aspects of using L1 in L2 classroom. Besides, they had to use L1 more than what is required to cope with students' ability which created frustration among some people. Teachers and parental community are not concerned about the use of language in the classroom. They are product oriented and prefer good grades rather learning. Teachers and students think L2 learning may become slower if L1 highly used in the classroom. They try to limit the use of L1 but failed due to the level of understanding of students. In other words, the real classroom situation in Bangladesh seemed to be alien from the viewpoint of methodologies, researches of different countries in respect of use of L1 in L2 classroom where nothing works except preparation for exams.

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