



## **Bilingual Mode of Teaching and Learning ESL Skills in Rural Bengal: A Psycholinguistic Study**

**Animesh Biswas**

State Aided College Teacher (Category- I), Department of English Dum Dum Motijheel College, Kolkata, W.B.  
Email: [animeshbiswas853@gmail.com](mailto:animeshbiswas853@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language has always been a challenging affair for the students of Bengali- medium Government and Government-aided schools in Bengal especially in rural areas. It has been a very problematic and difficult enterprise from the elementary level to the secondary level due to poor infrastructure and lack of adequately trained teachers and above all due to their insufficient amount of exposure to the target language. The kind of methods and techniques employed by the teachers are not in harmony with the requirements and needs of the students. The four basic skills of language (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) have always been affected on account of unavailability of trained teachers and absence of suitable methods and techniques. This study is going to highlight the problems of ESL learners related to inadequate exposure to L2 and the impact of their L1 in acquiring and learning the target language in a bilingual context.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Learning Skills, Language Acquisition, Bilingualism

### **Introduction**

Bilingualism in Bengal serves an extremely crucial purpose by offering a potential tool for the ESL learners to acquire both the grammatical words and the content words effectively. This longitudinal study is going to address the issues related to the acquisition of English as a second language in the specific context of Bengal with special reference to the learners learning how to develop the four basic language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) of the target language. Writing is a skill that needs to be acquired within the formal instructional and structural settings. The learners of Bengal find it difficult to overcome the mother tongue influence specially while writing. Psycholinguistically certain prerequisites are there before we proceed to put down something on paper. The psychodynamics of acquiring the skill to write something in one's Second Language operates quite crucially. The study aims to explore the areas of ELT where Bilingualism comes into play. The researcher is going to highlight the impact of bilingualism on the three successive stages of acquiring the ESL writing skill namely planning, preparation and production/ presentation. Bilingualism impacts on the choice of

words (lexis), the structure and formation of the sentence in accordance with the subject verb agreement (syntax) although L1 and L2 differ structurally. The raw and primary data has been collected from across 10 schools from the remote areas of Bengal. The population was heterogeneous. The systematic random sampling procedure has been employed to elicit data from the population. A quantitative statistical analysis and inference of the collected data has been done focusing on the number of areas where bilingualism is instrumental or detrimental in producing ESL writing effectively. Bilingualism is effective in the acquisition of ESL writing with certain drawbacks. The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky is the backbone of this study. The zone of proximal development is also crucial since it enhances the possibility for effective acquisition of ESL Writing. The lexical density and diversity along with the syntactical deviations and semantic variations are largely the results of bilingualism.

Listening skill is related to the cognitive behavioural approaches of the students. Listening is categorically related to the memory level of understanding. In Bengal, especially in rural areas there is hardly any emphasis given to improve this skill among learners. The students are rarely given that opportunity to learn new sounds of English via memorizing difficult and choicest of expressions. Listening skill is related directly to the Speaking skill as language learning is a linear model of acquisition. There is a sheer lack of adequately trained teachers and infrastructural facilities like audio systems for introducing the learners with the phonetic sounds and audio-visual aids so that the learners can easily relate their new learning with the external reality in a concrete manner in rural schools of Bengal. Within the structured instructional setting there is not enough time for the teachers to go for the individual care and attention via interaction with the learners and meet their needs in an effective manner. The teachers are prone towards finishing the syllabus hurriedly for the exam purpose which is again a very strong reason why the learners are lagging behind in effective acquisition of the language skills. This longitudinal study is going to highlight the issue of acquiring listening skill via the existing methods which are essentially inadequate to meet the needs of the learners. How bilingual methods of teaching language skills are highly inadequate to meet the needs of the learners.

Reading is another crucial language skill, specially structured and intensive reading methods or read aloud methods are of no avail to the improvement in pronouncing the words correctly unless the Bilingual method of interpretation and explanation is done away with. Reading specially in rural schools of Bengal is almost a very least practised mode. Reading with

incorrect pronunciation and intonation is largely due to their difficulty in identifying the words. Reading should be made a regular affair and it must be practised with innovative approach and with the help of technology if accessible. Students should get familiar with the sound system of that language through pronouncing different speech sounds.

Speaking skill is the most neglected area of language learning and acquisition in rural areas of Bengal. The school syllabus doesn't provide any provision for any kind of course for speaking skill enhancement. The school curriculum is inadequate for the learners to learn this essential skill and better their future prospect. This proposed study is going to address the issues related to the poor performance of the learners in communicating effectively in the target language. Speaking skill is related to the learner's grammatical sensibility and how they are being introduced to the different elements of the grammar of the target language.

### **Psycholinguistic Approach:**

Psycholinguistics should be the theoretical backbone of this study as it is linked with the mental patterning and structuring of the newly learnt items in the minds of the learners. Linguistics and Psychology have a closer affinity with the cognitive maturity of the learners. Psychologically the learners are inclined towards their mother tongue (L1) and they get it as a helping hand whenever they are finding anything difficult in the target language. This longitudinal study is going to explore certain problematic areas in acquiring English as a Second Language in Rural Bengal where the learners have lesser accessibility and communicative competence, which have never been talked of earlier. Above all how bilingual method of teaching and learning ESL works as a detriment for the learners to acquire the basic skills of their target language.

### **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory:**

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has been one of the most influential theories of language acquisition. Its basic tenets are inextricably connected with the linguistic and pedagogical skills. The primary aim of acquiring any language is to communicate effectively with the peers of society. Language can't be learnt in isolation. It has to be imparted in an instructional and structured setting thereby inculcating the pedagogical aspects of language acquisition to the society at large. Societal norms and standards of communication skills are essential for the enrichment of the native culture of the learners. The concept of ZPD (Zone of Proximal

Development) is also very crucial for any study on bilingual education system and the bilingual learners are given optimal opportunity for acquiring the target language within their desired growth and rate of success.

The questions that are being raised in this study are whether the First language( L1) of the learners does have any impact on the acquisition of syntactic abilities , whether the First language (L1) of the learners contributes in enhancing linguistic density and diversity , whether the First language of the learners (L1) plays an instrumental role in coherence and cohesion in second language writing and whether the First language of the learners does really have an impact on the semantics and morphology of the learners. The bilingual mode of education can both be instrumental or detrimental in enhancing the language skills of the learners. In the context of Bengal, we find there are certain drawbacks as well as merits of this method of teaching and learning. For example, when the teacher is explicating some crucial points in the classroom in L1, the learners are easily able to understand the content or decode the message. On the other hand while the learners are asked to deliver a lecture on any topic or exercise their speaking skill in English(L2), they are finding it very difficult since their L1 is a major impediment in their smooth interaction in L2. Here psychodynamics of the learners plays a very crucial role since the learners are not able to translate anything effortlessly from their L1 to L2. The grammar-translation method is effective up-to certain grades, but this method may not be applicable for learners of all levels. Instead, direct method of teaching and learning must be encouraged for the learners to effectively acquire the language skills of their target language. For example, while the learners are being imparted any lesson on any grammatical item, direct method of teaching and learning is the most suitable and potent method since grammar is a structural concept.

### **Syntactical Deviations**

Bilingual mode of education is a major hindrance for the Bengali medium learners to acquire the syntactic awareness. The L1 of the learners follows a certain subject + object +verb agreement whereas the L2 of the learners follows a different subject+ verb+ object agreement. Thus both the languages follow different syntactical structures. Therefore, it's improper to learn the syntactic structures of L2 with the help of L1. It's prescribed that the learners must learn the syntactical structures of their target language with the help of their L2 only. Syntactical deviations also lead the learners to write or utter grammatically incorrect sentences.

### **Lexical Density and Diversity**

The Bengali medium learners are lagging behind in terms of their lexical density and diversity. Lexical density is the maximum number of words the learners are using both inside the classroom where they are learning in a structured instructional setting and outside the classroom where they are engaged in various forms of social interactions. Lexical diversity is the outcome of the various terms and words the learners are both exposed to and familiar of. The kinds of words they are using in any discourse and the number of words that are being used or uttered by the learners are highly significant for their effective acquisition of the target language. The L1 of the learners is really detrimental in enhancing the vocabulary or the stock of words of the learners since the learners are learning new English words by translating those in their L1. Therefore, the learners are not exposed to other synonymous words of any particular English word. It's impacting the learners acquiring new words in their target language in a negative manner.

### **Coherence and Cohesion**

Coherence and cohesion are inextricably intertwined with the writing skill of the Bengali medium ESL learners. Coherence adds to the logical and sequential development of writing where the ideas and concepts come one after another in a correlational manner. Essential skills may vary from one area to another or may be depending upon their expertise. No doubt, they must be reinvigorated to enhance their skills such as attributes towards problem solving; self-management; and the ability to work as a team (Mishra,2020).The learners are not expected to skip from one concept to the other. Cohesion is yet another concept which adds to the quality of the writing. Cohesive markers are used to establish the logical link of one sentence to its preceding and succeeding sentences. The problem-solving tasks and exercises for the learners such as rearranging jumbled up sentences in proper sequence to write a meaningful paragraph can enhance their skills related to coherence and cohesion. It is imperative for the learners to learn how a part of speech like pronoun help to bind sentences at the suprasentential level thus making the paragraph cohesive, on the other hand the learners are exposed to the various semantic elements which adds coherence to the paragraph. These are the two important concepts which the learners must acquire to become competent writers in L2.

**Conclusion**

To conclude we can say that Bilingual mode of education in Bengal has its own drawbacks at the same time it has been one of the most potential method of teaching in specially the rural areas of Bengal due to the inadequate exposure of the learners to their L2. The learners are hardly exposed to their L2 outside the classroom where they are more comfortable with their L1 as a standard mode of communication. In the pedagogy the learners over dependence on their L1 is a major hindrance or impediment for their effective acquisition of the target language. Therefore, the Bilingual method is inadequate in the acquisition of the language skills of the target language of the Bengali medium ESL learners.

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