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## Languages used by teachers in English-language classrooms: An EFL perspective

Souvik Barua \*

*Chittagong Independent University, Chattogram, Bangladesh.*

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### Abstract

Language and language policy researchers are particularly interested in the development of using English in the English language classroom in an EFL context in this era of globalization and internationalization. The main focus of the study was to find answers to the questions of what languages are used in the EFL classroom and what problems teachers have in using English at the secondary level in Bangladesh. According to the data from the study, teachers were challenged by their own language skills, students' language ability, and pedagogical problems. The findings of this study will help teachers examine themselves more closely and come up with better ideas and reasons for their techniques and attitudes toward English language teaching. Additionally, the study may reveal the teachers' perspectives on the issues their students face. In Bangladesh, social and economic disparities in two different regions within the same country produce an imbalance in English language teaching, which obstructs the implementation of effective use of English as a language of instruction in the classroom. Taking this into account, educators must focus on the procedures for an engaging and neutral English language classroom use.

**Keywords:** English as a Language of Instruction; English Language Teaching; Teachers' Proficiency; Language Skills

### 1. Introduction

In the new linguistic global order, including Bangladesh, the usage of English has been evaluated from a variety of perspectives. According to some, this is all part of a growing socioeconomic conspiracy, a new form of colonialism. Others argue that a single common utilitarian language understood by all English-speaking people worldwide is essential. Some consider it the language of business, trade, and profit. Many people in Bangladesh believe that learning English will aid them in obtaining high-profile jobs and even a life of luxury in a foreign country [13].

In the 1990s, we witnessed how educational systems serving countries across the globe had to adapt to the rapidly changing language landscape. The 1998-developed curriculum aimed to modernize textbooks, exams, and in-service teacher training. The purpose of this textbook was to shift English language teaching from a grammar-based to a communicative effectiveness-based approach. Recent forms of e-commerce and outsourcing have pushed English to become the language of science, business, and new key skilled professions. As of 2021, it is being rapidly integrated into the curricula of a large number of countries, including Bangladesh, from pre-school through higher education. Government policy promotes demand for English as a second language, which is sustained by a middle class with global aspirations [13].

The Ministry of Education in Bangladesh has made English a mandatory core subject for students in grades 1 through 12. Given that English is selected as the language of teaching for English language studies, it is evident that English proficiency is required in Bangladesh. If you live in Bangladesh, you're more likely to use English because it's used by both national and international organizations [1].

\* Corresponding author: Souvik Baura  
Chittagong Independent University, Chattogram, Bangladesh. Email: [bsouvikr@gmail.com](mailto:bsouvikr@gmail.com)

English as a language of communication in the classroom may have positive or negative educational implications. On multiple continents, attempts to learn through English have resulted in confusion, despair, and high dropout rates. Alternately, it has been presented using appropriate teaching methods, with positive and lasting results. This study will investigate how secondary school teachers in Bangladesh actually teach and whether or not other languages are used in English-speaking classrooms.

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## 2. Research Questions

This study is predicated on three key questions:

- Which languages do secondary school EFL teachers in Bangladesh employ?
- Why do EFL teachers use specific languages?
- How do various languages affect overall English teaching and learning?

### 2.1. The Purpose of the Present Study

This is a case study, and the purpose is to learn more about the languages used by Bangladeshi teachers and students in English classes, the variables that impact their language choice, and how different languages contribute to the overall learning of English. This study will concentrate mostly on teachers' viewpoints and potential reasons for adopting specific languages in English language classes, such as their mother tongue or English. This research may also indicate teachers' impressions of the challenges their students face. This in-depth study will reveal how Bangladeshi secondary school teachers use instructional language in their classrooms and whether economic, historical, political, and sociocultural factors have an impact on how teachers use language in their classrooms.

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## 3. Review of Literature

Due to a lack of English-speaking teachers, [19] asserts that the communicative approach, the current trend in English language training, cannot be successfully adopted in China. Due to a lack of skilled teachers, rural areas are in a worse position than urban regions. [19] identifies comparable anomalies in Malaysian teaching strategies. [15] observed a problem in Malaysia, including the failure of students on examinations as a result of an insufficiency of qualified teachers with sufficient English ability.

Concerns were raised in Indonesia that, according to [3], not all teachers were certified or capable of teaching via EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) and that there may be a generational divide, with older teachers missing the necessary English language skills. In Ethiopia, teachers were deemed qualified provided they held a bachelor's degree from a university or college, notwithstanding the concern that they lacked English ability. [3] discovers that while parents in Ethiopia want their children to learn English, educated parents perceive teachers' competence levels in teaching English as a language as quite low, and they frequently complain that professional teachers are lacking in public schools. A study done by [14] found that teachers who do not speak English well are the biggest problem with using English to teach.

[21] study the teachers' duties in South Africa. This study's findings indicate that teachers are usually unaware of their inability to meet their students' language needs. Teachers must not only know how to teach the four core skills, but they also need to know how to use Language of Instruction (LoI) strategies to teach them. Teachers lacked both the verbal and written skills necessary to aid their students in achieving academic skills. The most important need for an effective LoI was that the language proficiency requirement be met. Teachers either disregarded or were unaware of the importance of employing methodological abilities.

Numerous studies have been undertaken on school policies for English language teaching [2, 5, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 25]. [22] explores teachers' use of classroom language in a case study of a Hong Kong secondary school language classroom. To establish the efficacy of English as the sole language of teaching in Hong Kong, he compared the preferences of two non-native English language classes taught with two separate pedagogical approaches. Simultaneously, he studied the possibility of a connection between developing English proficiency in both groups. The results demonstrated that the class that closely adhered to English as the language of teaching performed well, and that their English abilities were also superior to those of the class with Cantonese as a medium of education. [16] conducted a similar study. They found that in the Philippines, where there are many different languages, the Multi-Lingual Class had a lower score on a test than the English-Only Class.

For English to be used as the language of teaching, in-service teacher training is crucial. According to [2], teachers who employ a "language of teaching" approach to teaching English require pedagogical training. In their study in South Africa, [21] found that none of the teachers had received training to equip them with the skills required to effectively use English as a medium of teaching when teaching. [15] says that in Malaysia, there aren't enough certified teachers with good English skills to teach English classes.

Students' English communication skills have a substantial effect on their learning. In her case study, [5] discovers that the learners' lack of proficiency is the most significant difficulty in their EMI classes. Teachers' teachings and explanations are therefore difficult for students to comprehend. She also notes that many students learn English for the sole aim of passing language exams. Therefore, students have difficulty conversing in English during EMI classes. Consequently, students would be unable to follow courses and read texts. They would also be unable to write assignments or take tests well if they didn't have a certain level of proficiency in academic English.

The curriculum stresses four language skills, although assessments are only based on two of them: reading and writing. The other two abilities, speaking and listening, are left formally untested. Some English language teachers at more advanced institutions may conduct informal assessments of their students' listening and speaking abilities. Despite this, most students still have a hard time communicating effectively in English even after they finish high school [8].

The use of classroom languages in Bangladeshi schools has been the subject of scant research. According to one of the findings of this study, only a few of the participating teachers used English as the teaching language for the entire lesson. Most of the participants in this study spoke a combination of English and Bengali. Teachers had the propensity of slipping into Bengali after beginning a statement in English [6]. This survey identifies teachers with inadequate English competence. They use Bengali even in English classes, due to their lack of ability to communicate in English.

It is difficult for kids to have a firm command of the English language at the completion of high school. Students in Bangladesh begin learning English in the first grade of elementary school and receive at least ten years of English education by the time they complete secondary school. Even after so many years of English language study, there is no acceptable level of proficiency. Since students in Bangladesh are rarely exposed to the language outside of the classroom, [18] argue that the classroom is the greatest place to practice English because it is the only place where students have the opportunity to do so. Nonetheless, for the same reason, the English proficiency of the learners is relatively low, necessitating the employment of a significant amount of Bengali in English language teaching. According to teachers, the amount of English used in the classroom is mostly determined by students' proficiency levels [18]. In addition, English teachers have to deal with the fact that they have to teach a class with a lot of students in a short amount of time, which can be difficult [10].

The teacher-centered method included exercises such as the teacher reading from a textbook and explaining something in Bengali and English, the L1 and L2. Although Bengali explanations were heard throughout the entire observation, English explanations lasted for only 15 minutes [7]. Current curricula and teaching approaches prohibit the regular usage of the native language and maintain that the mother tongue should be used only when all other options have been explored. Creating an "English atmosphere" in the classroom is intended to assist student learning. The biggest issue here, according to the teachers, is that they chose Bengali as the language of instruction, even for English classes, due to their lack of proficiency in the language. It negatively affects learners' capacity to communicate in the target language [6].

Other than those revealed in studies conducted in other nations with comparable teaching situations, there could be obstacles. In addition, while the three studies in Bangladesh provide a picture of the execution of the current curriculum, two of them do not provide an in-depth examination of the reasons for teachers' choice of languages, particularly Bengali in secondary English language teaching. Certain Bengali characteristics used by teachers in English language lessons have not been adequately investigated. An in-depth investigation based on interviews and classroom observations is necessary to gain an accurate depiction of the English teaching and learning environment in Bangladesh.

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#### 4. Methods

In addition to a qualitative methodology, a case study approach was selected for this study because it analyzes in depth the reasons for teachers' use of language in secondary schools in Bangladesh. Case studies require the collection and analysis of data from a variety of sources, such as interviews, observations, and existing documents [9]. Case study research has a much broader scope. It involves using numerous evidence sources to conduct an empirical analysis of a current phenomenon in its natural environment [23]. Case study methodologies allow researchers to determine how and why current events, problems, and circumstances occur as they do [24].

14 teachers from 11 schools in the city (8 participants) and country (6 participants) of Bangladesh were chosen at random to participate in this study in order to provide a wider range of perspectives from teachers in various situations. This group of teachers comes from diverse academic disciplines, as shown in Table 1. In this paper, pseudonyms have been given to the teachers who took part. This is done to ensure that their identities remain private.

**Table 1** Participants' Profile

Name of the Teachers	Age	Gender	Experience	School Setting	Academic Qualifications	Training
Arfanuddin	39	M	9	Urban	BA (Honours), MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Zia	37	M	10	Urban	BA (Honours), MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Ataullah	45	M	18	Rural	BA	BEd
Akram	42	M	14	Rural	BA	N/A
Habib	35	M	8	Urban	BA (Honours), MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Karim	48	M	20	Rural	BA, MA	Bed, MEd
Rudra	38	M	10	Urban	BA (Honours), MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Amit	38	M	10	Urban	BA, MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Shaheda	40	F	14	Rural	BA	N/A
Shahedul	37	M	10	Urban	BA (Honours), MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Zaman	52	M	25	Rural	BA	BEd
Tazrin	32	F	5	Urban	BA (Honours), MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Touhid	36	M	6	Rural	BA (Honours), MA	Registration Certificate, NTRCA
Nabila	30	F	6	Urban	BA (Honours), MA	ELT

*Note:* BEd = Bachelor of Education; MEd = Master of Education. NTRCA = Non-Government Teachers' Registration and Certification Authority. Bangladesh offers two types of one-year training programs, including BEd and MEd. These are viewed as one year professional training degrees.

To collect data, teachers were interviewed and classroom lessons were observed. Semi-structured interviews with secondary English language teachers were conducted. The adaptability of semi-structured interviews permits the investigation of issues that arise unexpectedly during the interview [17]. Before and after the classroom observations, each teacher was interviewed twice. The first interview was followed by a semi-structured observation of what language the teacher and students used in the classroom.

On the observation form, the activities were described (See Appendix A). The purpose of the interview prior to the observation was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' teaching experience. The researcher developed post-observation interview questions based on his observations. The interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

## 5. Findings

The existing curriculum stresses English as the language of instruction in order to strengthen students' language skills. However, classroom data indicates that English is not used as the sole language of teaching to teach textbooks. Outside of city areas, Bengali is the predominant language of instruction. Other city teachers taught in both Bengali and English. Teachers reported using Bengali in the classroom for two reasons: the students' language proficiency and their own lack of language ability. The section that follows explores these two concepts in depth.

### 5.1. Students' Language Skills

Due to students' limited English proficiency, it was difficult for teachers to use English as the sole language of teaching in many regions. Ten participants stated that their students' English language proficiency was insufficient for them to comprehend the teacher's teachings in English, so they opted to teach in Bengali. A Chittagong City Corporation school teacher, Ziauddin, stated that students had difficulty understanding him when he spoke in English and that he eventually overcame his tendency to do so. Atahullah, a teacher with eighteen years of experience in a country school, explained that he teaches in Bengali to make things more understandable to the students. Another teacher, Akram, finds no reason to teach in English when it does not make sense to students.

There is a significant lack of linguistic competence among students in rural areas. It appears that the social and economic circumstances of students in rural areas are a major contributor to their low proficiency. Karim, a country teacher, explained that because the students in these areas came from poor, illiterate households, they had no one at home to

help them learn English and no exposure to the language outside of school. Poverty prevents parents in rural areas from affording private education. In a number of instances, their son or daughter was the first member of their family to attend school.

The English proficiency of students in schools located in rural areas was notably low. This was attributed to particular school administration issues. A participant, Zaman, emphasized that teachers must continue to promote these students to the secondary level because, if they are not promoted, their parents will no longer pay for their education. In such a state, schools would be unable to function, and if their children were not promoted, their parents would petition the management committee to move them up to the next grade, putting teachers under immense pressure. Students who didn't meet the requirements for a new level were promoted, and students in remote schools couldn't improve their English skills, no matter what grade they were in.

Many teachers believe that the overemphasis on assessments based solely on reading and writing skills in Bangladeshi education contributes to students' inability to use English in class. The assessment of speaking abilities is completely disregarded. Shahedul, one of the participants, expresses skepticism regarding the system: "Why change anything if the testing method is not altered?" In the classroom, students are not required to learn how to speak English. Instead, they are encouraged to focus on passing their exams.

## 5.2. Teachers' Language Skills

The language proficiency of the teachers is another obstacle to the use of English in EFL classrooms. The teachers' lack of proficiency in speaking English has impeded the use of English as an instructional language. It appears that the academic background of teachers and their choice of profession contribute to the difficulty of using English in classrooms. Academic background is a significant factor in teachers' limited English proficiency. This contributed to the fact that the majority of teachers were incapable of teaching in English.

According to Shaheda, many English teachers who hold a bachelor's degree in a different field find it difficult to teach students in English. She went on to say that she studied Bengali as an undergraduate student and was never required to speak English. As a result, it was difficult for her to communicate clearly with her students as an English teacher. Teachers used Bengali as a more convenient way to teach because they didn't have the confidence to use English in the classroom. This was to make up for their lack of confidence.

## 5.3. Other Issues

Another factor contributing to some teachers' lack of English proficiency in remote schools appeared to be administrative politics. Participants asserted that, in some instances, incompetent English teachers were hired based on the recommendations of influential community members. Teaching in English was difficult for these teachers. According to interview data, the low level of English proficiency of these teachers in the classroom caused issues, a problem with multiple socioeconomic and biased-administrative causes. Such administrative politics seemed to be at play when it came to appointing under-qualified teachers, putting teaching practices in a bind.

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## 6. Discussion

Despite the fact that training programs require English to be the only language used in the classroom, data shows that participants in urban areas use both Bengali and English when teaching, whereas teachers in rural areas only use Bengali. Due to their students' limited English proficiency, the majority of teachers use Bengali as the language of teaching. Teachers did not teach in English because students would be unable to understand it.

The Interaction Hypothesis is the foundation of this study's theoretical framework. According to the Interaction Hypothesis, personal and direct interaction is one of the most effective ways to learn a new language. According to the results of this study, participants in urban areas teach predominantly in Bengali and occasionally in English, whereas teachers in rural areas only teach in Bengali. Due to the fact that classes are primarily conducted in Bengali, there is no spontaneous English interaction. The Interaction Hypothesis of Professor Long combines the input and output theories in second language acquisition (SLA). According to the results of the study, students do not receive English-language input. As a result, output is literally obstructed.

For English language acquisition in Bangladeshi classrooms, the most prevalent and conventional pedagogical systems are traditional approaches. Although these strategies are widely employed in the classroom, teaching English through the practice of the English language is not the primary focus. A small percentage of English language teachers employ a more communicative approach to developing L2 skills in the classroom. "Teacher Talk" in the target language is an

essential source of language input for students who are already learning English as a second language. If there is no "teacher talk," there is no linguistic input and, therefore, no output. In other words, the use of English by teachers in the classroom will serve as a catalyst, causing classroom engagement and thereby facilitating the language use of students. The ability to interact in the second language is crucial for L2-proficiency [4].

Students cannot effectively communicate orally with the aid of English textbooks. A typical English textbook chapter for secondary students focuses on reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary, with communicative tasks added at the end. Teachers are frequently pressed for time to complete each chapter, leaving little or no time for communicative output. Teachers of English in Bangladesh are pedagogically constrained, compelled to teach outmoded grammatical forms via tedious topic chapters.

In Bangladesh, attempts to implement a communicative approach to the teaching of the English language have generally failed. This may be due to an emphasis on exams, insufficient teacher preparation, or the inability of teachers to comprehend the concepts and procedures of the communicative approach. It has also been suggested that resistance to the communicative approach is another reason why it has not been compatible with the teaching profession. One possible explanation for this is Bangladesh's English teachers' overall lack of proficiency. Consequently, many of them refuse to teach in English.

In addition, our requirement that teachers in English-language classrooms use English is unrealistic. If teachers have a weak command of English or believe they have a weak command of English, it is unlikely they will choose to use English in the classroom. Numerous English teachers already struggle to balance their teaching workload with their other responsibilities. Numerous of them have a limited understanding of the language. This, along with a lack of confidence in their ability to communicate in English, makes it difficult to set up the best conditions for teaching in English.

Numerous English-language teachers disagree that "using English in English-language classrooms" is the most effective way to meet students' needs. The traditional grammar-translation method continues to enjoy wide acceptance.

In some instances, particularly in Bangladesh, it was impossible for teachers to teach in English due to their own poor command of the language. Their lack of competence was influenced by their intellectual background. According to this survey, there are no subject teachers in the country's schools, so any teacher can teach any subject. No formal academic degree is required to teach English in Bangladeshi schools.

In such a circumstance, it was also challenging to expect teachers to teach in English. [19] found the same thing in China and Malaysia, where there were not enough teachers who could speak English well enough to use the communicative method.

The secondary examination system does not include an oral English communication exam. Exams on paper and demonstrable grammatical proficiency have always been heavily emphasized. Exams at the secondary level have an effect on the grammar-translation approaches used in secondary schools in Bangladesh. They require students to demonstrate their understanding of syntax and vocabulary, as well as to translate complex Bengali to English and vice versa. Unquestionably, the students' proficiency in spoken English is far below their knowledge of English grammar.

Furthermore, teachers become exhausted, and this is a major issue that must be addressed: teachers are overworked and undertrained due to inadequate support and resources. Teachers are required to teach more than 100 students at once. Thus, classroom interaction cannot be productive. In addition, there is no system in place in Bangladesh to monitor the mental health of teachers, so more must be done to aid them.

The study found that the use of English as a medium of teaching varied significantly between rural and urban areas in Bangladesh. Teachers in urban areas taught using both English and Bengali, whereas teachers in rural areas used only Bengali. According to the participants, the skill levels of students from country and city areas were vastly different. Teachers in rural areas were unable to teach in English due to their belief that their students lacked the language comprehension skills necessary to do so. In rural areas, the majority of parents were uneducated, impoverished farmers or day laborers, and the student was frequently the first in his or her family to receive an education. Therefore, students lacked support from their families or at home, and school was their only option for learning English. In contrast, students living in urban areas received additional assistance from their parents outside of school hours.

In addition, teachers' academic credentials varied considerably, which affected their use of English in the classroom. [19] found differences in the skill levels of teachers, but his research did not examine how they used language in the classroom. [11] also observed that teachers in the city areas of Bangladesh were more qualified than those in the

country's rural areas. However, he did not demonstrate whether disparities in the academic qualifications of teachers resulted in any differences in teaching strategies. According to the current study, disparities in the academic credentials of teachers led to inconsistencies in their English language proficiency, resulting in disparities in Bangladesh based on locality. Teachers with outstanding academic credentials were reluctant to teach in country areas because they were unable to supplement their income through private teaching, whereas teachers in city areas could. In China, [12] discovered the same thing, and this study reflects that. He argued that skilled Chinese teachers prefer to teach in metropolitan and coastal areas due to the favorable living conditions, economic growth, and teacher education opportunities. In addition, the research from this study shows that differences in teachers' abilities can lead to differences in how well they teach in two parts of the same country.

## 7. Conclusion

It is challenging to make pedagogical adjustments without considering the relevant context. In Bangladesh, despite the government's efforts to provide teacher training so that the curriculum is properly taught, there is still a visible gap between curriculum rhetoric and pedagogical reality, rendering the teaching method inappropriate or ineffective. This research sheds light on a variety of obstacles that prevent teachers from teaching in English as recommended in textbooks and teachers' guides, thereby contributing to a better understanding of teaching styles in city and rural Bangladeshi secondary schools. New initiatives must be implemented to enhance the teaching-learning environment. Learner characteristics and instructional variables must be taken into account when deciding which instructional strategy to employ. The purpose of the study is to enhance educational policymakers' understanding of the significance of implementing new teaching strategies. Additional research involving a larger number of participants from a variety of locations is necessary to obtain a more complete picture of the English teaching and learning situation in Bangladesh.

## Appendix

### Appendix A

The classroom observation form is the tool that has been used to observe lessons in the classroom.

- Name of the school:
- Teacher's first and last name:
- Number of enrolled students:
- Number of students present:

	Instructional Language			Comments
	Entirely in English	A Mix of Bengali & English	Entirely in Bengali	
Task 1				
Task 2				
Task 3				
Task 4				

### Appendix B

- Questions concerning the interview:
- How many years have you taught English to students?
- How many years have you been teaching in this institution?
- Could you please provide details about your academic background?
- Have you undergone any training to improve your skills?
- Which language do you use as the language of instruction in the classroom?

## Compliance with ethical standards

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There are no conflicts of interest for the author to disclose. Content and writing of the paper are solely the author's responsibility.

### *Statement of informed consent*

All participants in the study gave their informed consent, and pseudonyms were assigned to those who participated.

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