

Challenges while Teaching English in the Social Science Classroom: A Bangladesh Perspective

Jurana Aziz

Assistant Professor in English

Department of Language Education

Institute of Education and Research

University of Dhaka

Bangladesh

Tel: 880-173-736-8120 E-mail: zurana879@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper written is based on the findings from a study conducted among the Social Science students of Advanced Level undertaking the English Language courses as Elective or compulsory and their mode of learning is Bengali other than few of these English courses. I have tried to explore some of the difficulties while teaching these students. Two groups of students were selected for experimental study and teaching was given following traditional approaches like CLT. Data were collected through classroom observation and questionnaires. Though the results found have some limitations, this paper aims at suggesting for the probable solutions to the problems and finally it opens a new window to face the learners with this type of challenging situation by adopting some of the innovative methods using the Humanistic approach of learning in English Language Teaching and Education.

Keywords: Challenges, Second language learners, Solutions

1. Introduction

English Language learners often face difficulties while learning it, especially if they are not exposed to this language for their everyday instruction. I had been observing students from the social science group who were learning English as one of their compulsory courses but their mode of learning for other courses is Bengali, which is their First language (L1). So they had been facing many problems while undertaking this course ACL-105. I tried to follow some instructions based on the idea of Humanistic approach and tried to implement few of the methods to solve the problems they encountered during learning.

In this paper I had focused on the problems they encountered first and then I had focused on the probable solutions to these problems. Finally I have shown how to meet the challenges of this kind of situation.

2. Statement of the Problem

Students of other groups like Social Science very often need to undertake some courses that are compulsory or elective beside their core courses. During that time it is found that they face different sort of problems that make them inhibited to learn a new language and they become unconfident to using that target language.

2.1 Research Question

What are the problems the social science students face while doing class with a English language teacher?

What are the possible reasons to the problems they encounter?

What are the probable solutions to the problems and how to solve those with present situation?

3. Methodology (Mixed method approach both qualitative and quantitative):

To conduct this research, I tried to follow the quantitative approach blending with the qualitative one. I took sample of 165 students in total, interviewed 10 teachers and observed at least 25 students while mostly by random sampling.

Instrument/Tools	Sample	Sample Technique
Questionnaire	165	Random Sampling
Interview	10	Purposive
Observation	25	Purposive

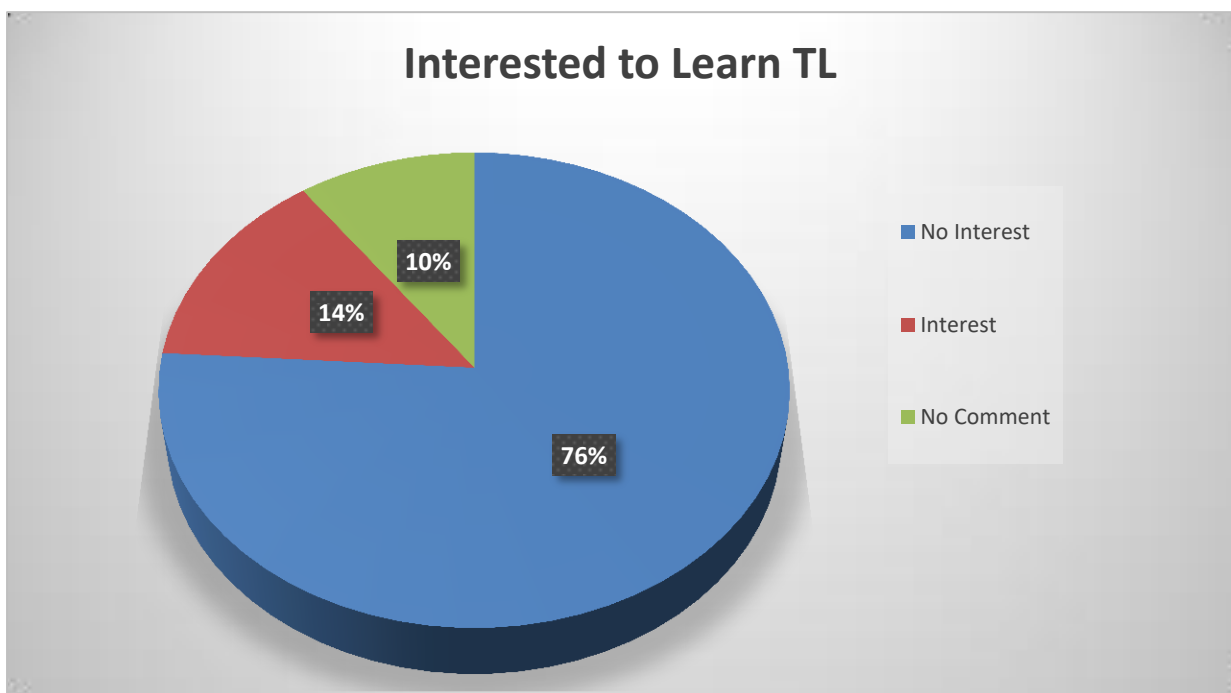
4. Findings

The challenges of the teacher while dealing with the social science students:

The problems of the learners that they encounter while learning I have found are;

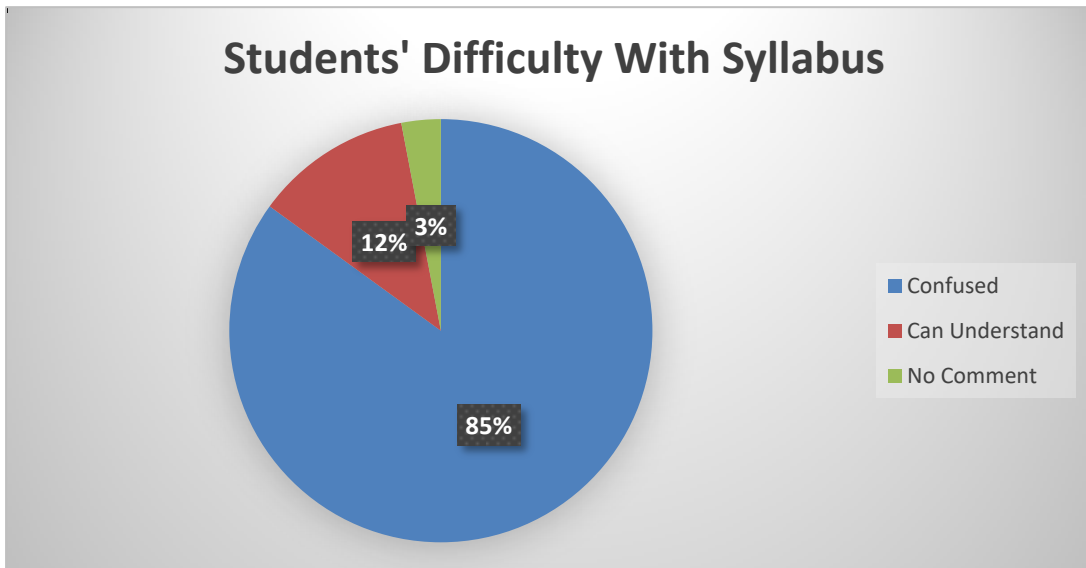
4.1 Lack of Interest

The first problem that affects the learning environment is that in most of the cases they are not interested to learn or practice the target language that is English for those English courses. The chart shows that about 76% students are not interested about English learning, 14 % students are interested and remaining 10% did not make any comment.



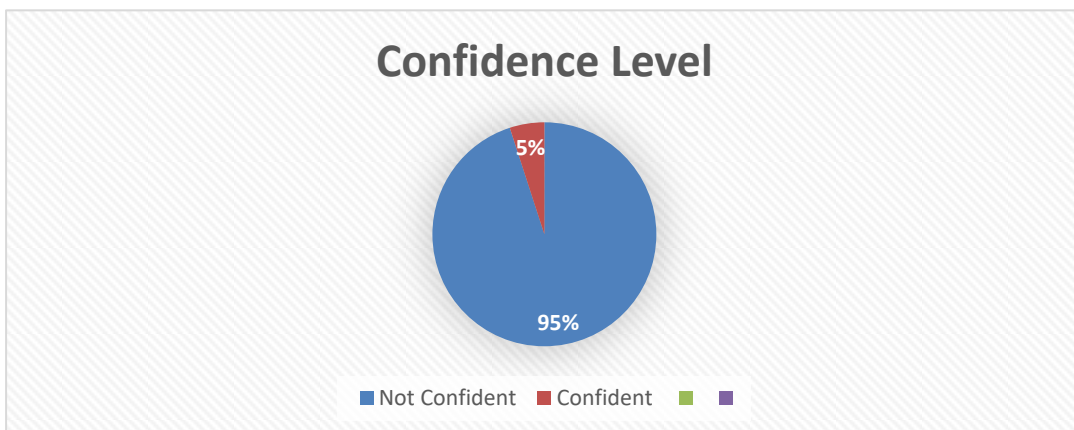
4.2 Confusion about the Syllabus and Mode of Learning

The problem that I encountered while teaching them is that most of them are using Bengali (that is their first language) as the mode of classroom instructions. They take notes on Bengali, follow the activities done in Bengali and their teachers are also using Bengali for giving them lectures. So they are not exposed to English that much. As a result they are confused while following every instruction in a new classroom where English is the Target language. Consequently they face problem to follow the syllabus written in English, they become confused to follow the instructions and always asking the teacher to change the mode of teaching. The following chart shows that 85% are confused totally, 12 % can understand the syllabus and 3 % did not respond.



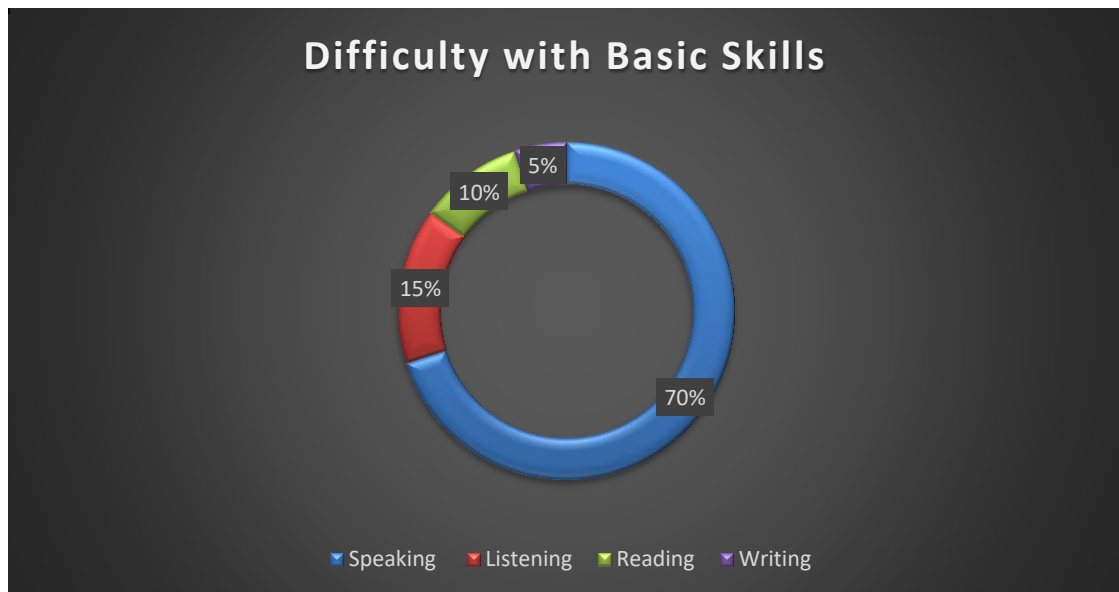
4.3 Lack of Confidence

The next problem that I found with the learners of Social Science group is they are inhibited to using English language as their main language of learning. They believe that they are not confident enough to using this language as it is not their main mode of earning at the higher level of education. About 95 % learners think they will not be able to produce a successful sentence inside the classroom, about 5 % students believe that they will not be able to speak fluent in front of the class.



4.4 Lack of Knowledge of Using the Four Basic Skills

I found while teaching them that they are not aware of using the four basic skills of English language and their usage in different contexts. About 70 % students faced problems with speaking, 15% with listening, 10% with reading, and 5 % with writing.



4.5 Difficulties in Understanding the Syntactic Parts of English Language

The next important problem is difficulties to understand the accents, transcription, intonation and grammatical components used in the classroom for teaching the target language. About 57% students are uncomfortable with grammatical parts, 27% with reading comprehension and 16 % due to poor basic.

As English is not the main mode of learning their other courses, they feel less interest to learn the grammatical parts of this language and as a result they fail to use it in the classroom contexts.

4.6 Frequent Switch of Codes Where Needed

Though the instructions should be given in the target language (English) inside the classroom, in most of the cases the learners fail to follow it. So being a teacher I needed to switch codes from English to Bengali and it reduces the scope of using the target language in a full context. Findings:

- 70 % are comfortable with delivering lecture in mixed language (Bangla and English)
- 30 % are comfortable with English only

4.7 The Intention of Only Passing the Exam

As it is a sort of subsidiary course, the learners are only focused to get marks in the exam and thus they are found to have less interest to using English Language. They are only worried for attaining good marks in the exam and thus the learning process remains ignored. Findings:

- 87% of the total students are worried of the passing of the exam
- 3% were found to achieve high level of proficiency in the future life. So to them English is only a language for accomplishing a course and nothing else.

5. The Recommendations for Solving the Problem

I found some simple but effective ways to attract the learners of other groups to learn English as their target language and these activities will enhance their interest to accommodate with a new language that is a challenge for them too.

5.1 Using Attractive Lesson Plan for the Language Classroom

The social science students are new to know the methodologies applied inside an English language classroom. If the teacher could adopt some of the attractive steps in a lesson plan that would be used in the social science classroom then the learners would be motivated to learn the target language. So for them such activities are important to employ like;

Use of linguistic component	Preferred type of activities
While using a play	Role play, simulation, jigsaw, stage performance, comparing characters.
While using a poetry	Recitation, historical background, character analysis, role play, information gap, poster presentation.
While using a novel	Analysing the setting, theme, plot, assignment works, group work, pair work.
While using a paragraph	Making them able to understand cohesive ties, contexts, cause and effect, argumentation, topic statements, thesis statements.

5.2 Giving Them Scope to Talk and Talk

Increasing the student talk is a very effective way to face the problems inside a social science classroom. Being a teacher I gave them ample scopes to share their views with their peers and then exchange their views. This has helped them to break their inhibition to use English as a second language inside the classroom. They enjoyed the presentation session and finally they could be able to monitor their own lacings and this has also helped them to disclose a wide range of errors that they had been making through years. As a CLT teacher I always appreciated them to talk and encouraged them to continue talking.

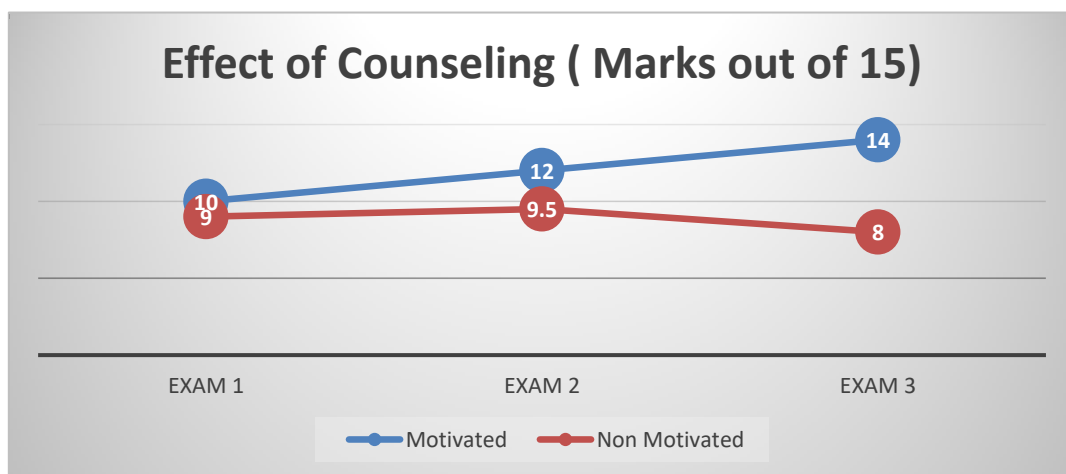
5.3 Adopting Humanistic Approach inside the Classroom

Being motivated by the idea of the Humanistic Approach (Carl Rodgers, 1952), I employed this approach to motivate my learners. It was wonderful to see that whenever I appreciated them they could get more interest in learning a new concept and they could feel that English

is just a language that can never be more powerful than their inner potentialities. It was found that students who are more nervous needed a little bit concentration from the teacher's side and when they are assured with it, they could project much better. In comparison to the other cases, I got my learners more confident at the end of the course while using English language.

5.4 Building a Personal Relationship and Counselling the Learners

It was also important that I found when I took the course that the learners needed positive reinforcement to get out of the groove. So I divided them into groups to focus on their mistakes and was counselling for them and it was astonishing that the group that was under careful supervision did better than the group that was overlooked.



5.5 Keeping Records of Their Performance

This is very important to understand the overall situation and the expected needs of the learners. It will also help the teacher like us to prepare a need-based analysis to follow for the learners of other groups. From that analysis we would be able to take necessary steps for overcoming the problems encountered in a classroom.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, teaching of English to a social science classroom is very challenging one. The learners are not usually exposed to the Target Language and there are different levels of learners. The teachers should know the problems of the learners and try to take effective measures to overcome those. Then the pedagogical approaches will be also implemented according to the curriculum also.

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