



The Impact of First Language and Cultural Background on English Learning among Bangladeshi EFL Learners

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Abstract. In an ever-globalized world in which English is a leading medium of instruction and communication, English proficiency is an important element in academic success and career mobility. Students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment like Bangladesh often encounter issues in attaining communicative competence mainly because of interference by their first language (L1) and culture which significantly affect other aspects of language acquisition such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, motivation and classroom participation. Though the previous research has identified the significance of the L1 transfer and sociocultural factors in the second language acquisition, there is still a gap in empirical quantitative research on the extent of the mentioned factors in the context of the Bangladeshi EFL. In order to fill this gap, this study utilized a quantitative survey of 40 undergraduate EFL students at American International University-Bangladesh using a structured questionnaire comprising of 13 Likert-scale questions, and descriptive statistics techniques (mean and standard deviation) to analyze the perceptions of the learners in relation to the influence of L1 and cultural factors to English learning. The instrument exhibited great reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.928 indicating good internal consistency. The results indicate a high degree of mean scores, which ranged between 4.08 and 4.68, showing that both L1 interference and cultural factors had a high degree of influence on the motivation of learners ($M = 4.68$), their confidence when teachers respect native culture ($M = 4.62$), and their comfort in classrooms ($M = 4.57$). On the whole, the results will imply that both linguistic and cultural factors are significant contributors to EFL learning experiences, and that integrating L1-based knowledge and cultural context of the learners into the English learning experience can enhance motivation, accuracy and confidence, and reduce language errors, with important pedagogical implications of developing culturally responsive and context-sensitive EFL teaching practices in Bangladesh, as well as of emphasizing the need to balance global English learning goals with local linguistic and cultural realities in order to improve learning outcomes.

Keywords: Native language interference, Cultural influence, EFL learners, Language transfer

1. Introduction

The role of English as a lingua franca in international communication, academic performance and professional mobility has become more and more prominent (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006). The proficiency in English has emerged as a prominent factor in achievement in tertiary education as well as international labour markets (Phillipson, 1992). In terms of students, proficiency in using English as a medium of instruction has a significant impact on academic achievement, cognitive growth and career opportunities, especially in the context where the first language (L1) is not English (Cummins, 2000;

Norton, 2013). In Bangladesh, where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL), a large percentage of students continue to fail to achieve functional proficiency due to the linguistic, pedagogical, and sociocultural constraints (Haque, 2013; Rahman, 2018).

The first language of students is one of the most successful factors of the EFL acquisition. Research that has been carried out regarding the acquisition of the second language has shown that there are both beneficial and detrimental transfer processes that may result in the acquisition of the second language (Odlin, 1989). The common mistakes of Bangladeshi EFL learners are due to the structural differences, which exist between the two languages' grammatical patterns, phonemic systems, and syntactic structures (Mahboob and Tilakaratna, 2007; Sultana, 2015). The role that language transfer plays in the determination of learning outcomes has since been elaborated in other studies (Gass and Selinker, 2008). The usage of articles, forming verb tenses, and pronunciation of consonant clusters are especially mentioned with negative transfer (Rahman and Karim, 2020). Not only does this type of linguistic interference impair accuracy, but also the confidence and willingness of the learners to communicate in a manner that is both communicative and comprehensible (Swain and Lapkin, 1995).

In addition to linguistic determinants, cultural determinants are also important to the EFL learning outcomes. Culture influences the motivation of the learners, the attitude of the learners in the classroom, as well as the overall perception of the learners towards language learning (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998). The teacher-centered standards and the unwillingness of the learners to speak usually influence the participation patterns in the Bangladeshi classrooms which results in the limited communicative engagement (Saha and Banik, 2017). Moreover, the difference in discourse conventions of Bangla and English also affect pragmatic competence, thereby, constraining the academic and conversational competencies (Canagarajah, 2002; Jenkins, 2000). This is also reflected in the recent research, indicating that the interdependence of the sociocultural identities of learners and the language learning strategies is one of the most important aspects that contribute to the achievement of the self-efficacy and performance outcomes (Norton and Toohey, 2011; Dornyei, 2019).

Although there are numerous studies that have been carried out in relation to the transfer of languages and how culture plays a role in acquisition of second language in various countries around the globe (Lado, 1957; Ellis, 2005), a relatively smaller number of quantitative studies have been conducted in the context of EFL learning in Bangladesh. The current local studies are mostly qualitative or descriptive in nature providing valuable information but lacking empirical data to quantify the magnitude of L1 and cultural influence on the performance of learners (Islam, 2019; Ahmed and Yousuf, 2020). In addition, these aspects have not been measured on the systematical basis, and certain linguistic difficulties at the grammatical, lexical, and phonological levels are not explored thoroughly (Chowdhury, 2021). This disparity inhibits the creation of evidence-based, culturally responsive teaching practices. In order to overcome these limitations, this research seeks to investigate the effect of the native language and cultural background of learners in English performance and classroom participation of EFL students in Bangladesh. The data will be gathered using standardized proficiency measures, questionnaires of the learners' backgrounds, and indicators of classroom engagement in a correlational quantitative design. Statistical analysis of relationships between linguistic and cultural

variables and learner performance will be done using statistical analysis tools like regression analysis and factor analysis. The previous studies on second language acquisition also contribute to the comprehension of how students acquire the second language in the classroom setting (Lightbown and Spada, 2013).

It is hoped that the results of this study will add value to the theoretical and practical fields, through the provision of empirical evidence on the role of L1 and cultural factors in EFL learning. These observations can be used to create pedagogical strategies that can integrate the linguistic and cultural resources of learners, thus fostering language acquisition, promoting positive transfer, and increasing the confidence of learners.

2 Research Objectives

- To examine the influence of native language and cultural background on English learning in EFL classrooms.
- To identify common grammar, sound, and word mistakes that happen because of native language influence.

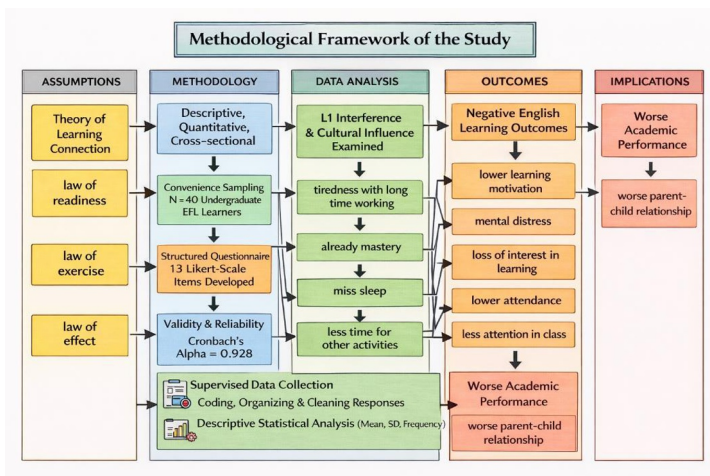
3 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives the research questions are being conducted below:

- What is the influence of native language and culture on learning EFL?
- What types of interference does the native language cause in EFL learners' grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary?

4 Methodology

Figure.1 Methodological Framework



The conceptual framework, as depicted in Figure 1, shows the relationship between L1 interference, cultural background and English learning outcomes and how the above factors interact in the learning process.

4.1 Research Design and Type

The research design used in this research study was a descriptive quantitative research design as it aimed at examining how the first language (L1) of learners and their cultural background affected the learning of English by undergraduate EFL learners in Bangladesh. The research is not an experiment whereby the researcher introduced an intervention or manipulated variables. Rather, it is concerned with the observation and description of naturally occurring patterns of L1 interference and cultural influence in various areas of language skill, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, motivation, and classroom interaction.

The quantitative design was selected in order to have an objective measurement of the perception and the experiences of the learners. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data and it was analyzed based on descriptive statistical methods such as mean, standard deviation and frequency distributions to determine overall trends and patterns amongst the respondents. The research adheres to the cross-sectional design as it will record the information about the participants at one time and will present the picture of what they are currently learning.

Also, a conceptual methodological framework was generated that demonstrates the correlation of L1 interference, cultural background, and the results of English language learning and it was used to guide the overall research and analysis.

4.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 40 American International University-Bangladesh undergraduate EFL students, and the sample included students of selected public and private universities in Bangladesh. Convenience sampling was used, that is, the participants were selected according to their availability and willingness to participate.

Demographic data such as age, gender, and academic level were gathered to provide the basic understanding of the sample characteristics. Most of the participants were aged between 18 and 24 years which were typical undergraduate learners in Bangladesh. To make the sample gender balanced, both male and female students were included, and the sample was relatively balanced.

The sample was selected based on various semesters, and the sample size was taken to cover a wide range of course levels within the undergraduate studies. This difference gave a wider perspective of the English learning experience across various proficiency levels. Despite different cultural and educational backgrounds, the participants of this study shared the language of the central focus of this study, which was Bangla, their first language (L1).

Although the sample size is quite small, it is suitable to conduct an exploratory descriptive quantitative study focused on finding general patterns and does not involve making broad generalizations.

4.3 *Data Collection Instrument*

A structured questionnaire that was tailored to this study was used to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into 13 items, which addressed the most important issues related to learning the English language due to L1 and cultural background.

The instrument encompassed the following large dimensions:

- Grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation interference of L1.
- Motivation, confidence, and classroom participation due to culture.
- The individual experiences of learners and their perceived challenges in learning English.

Items of the questionnaires were created in accordance with the instruments that were considered earlier as valid in the sphere of applied linguistics and EFL research and were modified to the educational setting in Bangladesh. A pilot test was carried out on a small sample of learners before the actual data collection to ensure that it was clear and relevant. According to the pilot study feedback, specific changes were made to enhance the clarity of words and understanding of the concepts.

A 5-point Likert scale was used to record the responses (Strongly Disagree (1), Strongly Agree (5)) so that the participants could respond to each statement with different degrees of agreement.

4.4 *Validity and Reliability*

In order to guarantee credibility and accuracy of the research instrument, multiple forms of validity and reliability tests were performed.

Content validity was ensured through expert review. The questionnaire items were assessed by EFL and applied linguistics specialists to ensure that they reflected the constructs of L1 interference and cultural influence on English learning, adequately. Their feedback served to perfect and enhance the instrument.

Pilot testing was used to ensure face validity, where participants rated the clarity, readability, and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items. Any vague or unclear provisions were amended in this manner.

Construct validity was also taken into consideration so as to make sure that the questionnaire was able to measure the intended theoretical constructs. The last form of the instrument was found to have a high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of 0.928 that represented a high degree of reliability.

In addition, precautions were taken to reduce bias in the coding and entry of data. Though the study is mainly descriptive, inter-rater consistency checks were done when

organizing responses to guarantee accuracy and minimize errors of subjective interpretation.

4.5 *Sampling and Data Collection*

The sample was convenience based as the participants were chosen according to their availability and desire to contribute to the study. This approach was deemed to be suitable because of time constraints and availability of responders in the university environment.

The participants were identified in the classroom settings and informed about the objective of the research prior to participation. The questionnaire was administered personally and was filled under supervised conditions with the aim of making the responses independent, honest, and free of any external influence.

Data collection was done using a standardized procedure in order to ensure uniformity among all participants. The questionnaire was to be filled after being given clear instructions and any doubts that were raised by the respondents were clarified to ensure that the questionnaire was filled correctly. All the responses were verified to be complete and then included in the dataset to be analyzed.

4.6 *Ethical Considerations*

The ethical considerations were strictly followed during the investigation in order to ensure the safety and rights of the participants:

- **Informed Consent:** Before data collection, the participants were given full information about the objective, process, and voluntariness of the study. A written consent was given.
- **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** The personal data and responses were anonymous. No report or publication did not reveal the identities of the participants.
- **Right to Withdraw:** They permitted the participants to quit the research at any point without necessarily giving any reason.
- **Data Security:** Data set on questionnaires and electronic data were safely kept and could only be accessed by the researcher.
- **Non-maleficence:** The study did not present any physical, psychological, or social harm to the participants. The whole process was intended to be comfortable and safe to the participants.
- **Ethical Approval:** The research was done in adherence to the ethical principles of the American International University-Bangladesh in question such as permission by the institutional review board.

4.7 Data Analysis

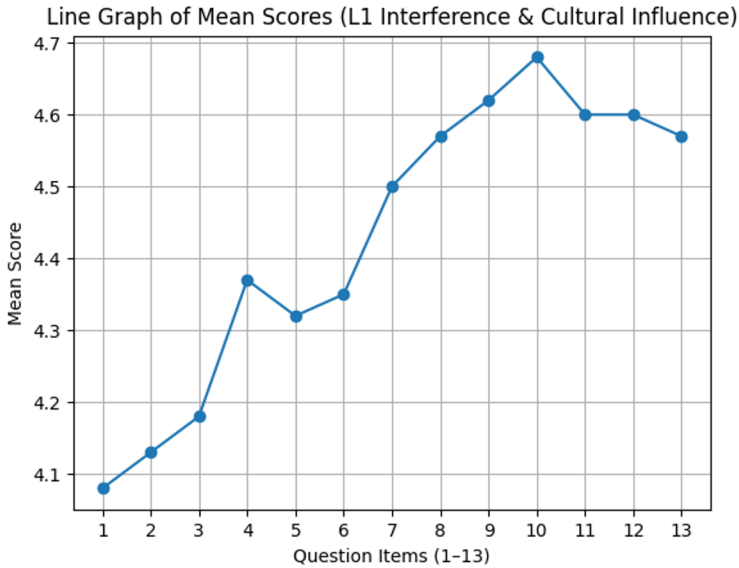
Figure.2 Line Graph

Figure 2 presents the line graph summarizing the trends in learners' responses.

The descriptive statistical analysis was performed on all response's measures, mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage. Analysis focused on:

- Determining the prevalent L1 errors in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.
- Evaluation of impact of cultural background on motivation, confidence and classroom involvement.
- Emphasizing the trends and patterns of learner perceptions and experiences.

No inferential statistical analysis was conducted, in line with the descriptive nature of the study. Results give information on the learner experience and enlighten culturally responsive teaching and learning strategies.

5 Results

Table 1. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.928	13

Table 1 presents the reliability statistics of the questionnaire. The questionnaire had high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.928 and 13 items showing that it

measured the perception of learners regarding the L1 interference and cultural influence on learning English. The results of the descriptive analysis of the responses of the 40 participants have demonstrated that the mean scores are consistently high (between 4.08 to 4.68) with standard deviation of 0.47 to 0.88 indicating

That the participants strongly agree, and the responses are not highly different.

By contrast, the results have shown that the L1 interference is apparent in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The sentence structure is also affected by L1 ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.764$), learners tend to use L1 grammar rules in the speech and writing ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.883$), pronunciation is influenced by L1 sounds ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.844$), and direct translation into L1 is frequent ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.764$). Cultural issues had a significant influence on the motivation, confidence and participation in classrooms where learners reported higher levels of motivation when English was associated with native language ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.474$), confidence when teachers showed respect towards the cultural background ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.490$) and comfort when the other learners had a similar cultural background ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.501$).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency
1. My native language affects the way I structure English sentences	40	2	5	4.08	.764	High
2. I often use my native language grammar rules when speaking or writing in English.	40	1	5	4.13	.883	High
3. My pronunciation of English words is influenced by the sounds of my native language.	40	1	5	4.18	.844	High
4.I find it easier to learn English words that are similar to words in my L1.	40	3	5	4.37	.628	High
5.I sometimes translate directly from my native language when speaking English.	40	1	5	4.32	.764	High
6. I feel shy to speak in class due to cultural expectations or norms.	40	1	5	4.35	.864	High
7. My cultural values shape the way I interact with teachers and classmates during English lessons.	40	3	5	4.50	.641	High
8.I feel more comfortable learning English when classmates share a similar cultural background.	40	4	5	4.57	.501	High
9.I feel more confident learning English when teachers respect my native culture.	40	4	5	4.62	.490	High
10. My motivation increases when I see connections between English and my native language.	40	4	5	4.68	.474	High
11.My teachers explain English grammar considering students' L1 background.	40	3	5	4.60	.591	High
12. I learn better when teachers encourage discussion about cultural differences in class.	40	3	5	4.60	.591	High
13.My teachers use culturally familiar examples to make lessons easier.	40	3	5	4.57	.594	High
Valid N (listwise)	40					

Overall, Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the participants' responses-indicate that students find L1 as well as cultural aspects to be highly relevant in influencing their experience in learning English. L1 interference can be divided into grammatical transfer, phonological transfer, and lexical transfer, and cultural influence complements engagement, motivation, and confidence.

These results imply that EFL education in Bangladesh can be made more productive, when strategies used in the process focus on maximizing the knowledge that learners have in their L1, as well as their cultural acquaintance, instead of trying to reject such specifics. The identification of these factors will enable teachers to form inclusive and motivating effective learning environments that enhance accuracy, minimize errors, and facilitate positive language transfer.

6 Discussion

The results of the present research reveal that the influence of first language (L1) as well as the cultural background of learners are important factors contributing to the English learning experience among Bangladeshi EFL learners. The overwhelming effect of L1 transfer is evident in grammatical, pronunciation, and vocabulary to a great extent. This is in line with the argument of Lado (1957) and Odlin (1989) that the systematic interference in the acquisition of a second language is due to structural differences between L1 and L2. The disparity between sentence structure in both Bengali and English, the absence of direct translations of some of the grammatical forms, and the difference in phonology are likely to be contributing factors to these recurrent challenges in the Bangladeshi context.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that L1 interference cannot be perceived as a negative factor only. The L1 language can also be used as a cognitive and pedagogical tool in L2 instruction as proposed by Cook (2001). The fact that the mean scores of the items related to the L1 use are rather high implies that the learners tend to use their native language as a support tool, especially when they have to process complex grammatical constructions or unfamiliar lexicon. This implies that a moderate and calculated utilization of L1 in EFL classrooms can lead to an understanding and not to an inhibited learning process.

Besides language influence, cultural background seems to have a profound implication on the affective and behavioral involvement of learners. The results indicate that the learners report increased motivation, confidence, and classroom participation when their cultural identity is recognized in the learning environment. This is in line with the concept of identity and investment in learning language as discussed by Norton (2013) which states that the willingness of the learners to participate is closely tied to how the identities of the learners are valued in the classroom. In the same vein, Kramsch (1998) contends that the learning of languages is more of a cultural process of meaning-making rather than a strictly cognitive process.

The findings are also testament to the impact of the traditional classroom culture in Bangladesh where teacher-centered instruction and the lack of oral participation continue to prevail. These classroom expectations can become the causes of anxiety and reluctance

to speak English among learners, as suggested in the previous research (Saha and Banik, 2017). Nevertheless, in case teachers use some culturally familiar examples and show respect to the backgrounds of learners, the latter feel much more confident and engaged. It implies that culturally responsive pedagogy could be instrumental in alleviating the affective barriers in the learning process of EFL students.

From a pedagogical point of view, the findings point to the need for a balanced approach where both linguistic and cultural aspects are incorporated into the English teaching. As opposed to abolishing the use of L1, teachers can find it advantageous to use L1 strategically to explain complex topics, aid in understanding, and/or to provide confidence to the learner. Simultaneously, the use of culturally relevant content may further increase the level of motivation and decrease the level of psychological barriers to participation.

On the whole, the analysis supports the notion that the EFL learning in Bangladesh cannot be detached from the linguistic and cultural reality of learners. Instruction in English should thus not be limited to a strictly target-language-only system, but should be designed in a more inclusive, context-sensitive way. This may be used to close the disjuncture between the global demands of English proficiency and the local conditions of learning, ultimately resulting in more effective, and meaningful, language learning outcomes.

7 Contribution of the study

The current study is pertinent to the current body of literature on the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in the context of first language (L1) and cultural background in determining grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, motivation and classroom participation. Although the past research was mostly descriptive, this study will present a statistical analysis of the degree of L1 interference, and the role of culture in enhancing confidence and engagement of the learners, hence addressing a critical gap in the Bangladeshi EFL setting.

Regarding methodology, the study follows a descriptive survey design with a systematically developed and tested questionnaire, which systematizes the experiences of learners in a structured and quantifiable manner. The methodological approach will provide a stable and consistent measurement of the two L1 and cultural effects and can be applied to other multilingual and EFL research settings, which will help to further develop the research practice in this field.

Practically, the results hold significant implications on EFL teachers and curriculum designers. It is through identifying the general linguistic error patterns and the ability to emphasize the significance of culturally responsive teaching methods that educators are able to incorporate both the L1 and the cultural background of the learners in the classroom activities in a more strategic manner. Integration can assist in increasing participation, minimizing mistakes, and enhancing motivation and self-confidence in learning a language.

At the policy level, the research makes it clear that multilingual and culturally sensitive pedagogies need to be included in the EFL curriculum planning and teacher training programs. The results can be applied to come up with evidence-based practices that will support inclusive, effective, and contextually relevant English language instruction.

These results are in line with the past studies emphasizing the importance of the first language (L1) and the culture of the learners in EFL learning. Previous research has demonstrated that L1 may affect the development of grammar and pronunciation (Khansir, 2012; Al-Khresheh, 2016), and cultural factors also have a significant impact on motivation and learner autonomy (Zhang and Graham, 2020; Biglari and Struys, 2021). Moreover, the more general theoretical perspectives are focused on the fact that the process of language learning is also closely related to the cultural context and learning strategies (Kaplan, 1966; Dornyei, 2009).

All in all, the current study adds to both the theoretical and practical knowledge about EFL learning by enriching the existing knowledge about L1 interference and cultural influence. It presents empirical evidence on the need to integrate linguistic and cultural resources available to learners and offers effective guidance to educators and policymakers involved in the development of inclusive and effective language teaching in multilingual classrooms.

8 Recommendations and conclusion

This paper has shown that the first language (L1) and cultural background of the Bangladeshi EFL learners play a critical role in their learning of English, especially grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, motivation, and classroom participation. Linguistic patterns of Bengali language are usually followed by the learners and CRI enhances the confidence, interest, and general learning process of learners.

According to these findings, the teaching of the EFL would be better to involve the L1 of learners to explain the grammar, the pronunciation, and the vocabulary, but not to discourage the usage of L1. In instruction, examples that are well known culturally should be made in the classroom materials and classroom activities to gain motivation and interest of participation. The training of teachers must focus on multilingual pedagogy so that it provides the teachers with the capability to exploit the linguistic and cultural assets of learners. Curriculum developers are expected to come up with data based inclusion in curriculum material that shows real learner mistakes and cultural backgrounds.

Research in the future might address longitudinal studies and mixed research methods in order to assess the long-term effects of L1 integration and culturally responsive practices at various levels of education and location. Although the sample was small and the study concentrated on one national case, the results have practical implications on EFL instructors, curriculum developers, and policy makers who aim at enhancing teaching and learning of languages in multilingual settings.

Altogether, the incorporation of L1 and cultural aspects into English instruction facilitates the reconciliation of local language facts with global communicative demands, which enhances convenient, efficient, and learner-centered pedagogy (McKay, 2002; Canagarajah, 2013; Crystal, 2012).

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