

Language Learners’ Insights on an EFL Teacher’s Responsibilities: A Case Study at Bangladesh Agricultural University

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Abstract: Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a second Language (ESL) context worldwide always strive hard to uphold their quality teaching by preparing their learners fit for the real life. Now-a-days, in communicative classrooms, teachers and learners enjoy friendly environment where they can contribute equally i.e. learners have the scopes to share their feelings with teachers without hesitation that helps to broaden the path of successful learning. At the same time, in the present world the views of the learners are considered with greater importance by teachers and educators as they believe in learner autonomy for effective teaching and learning. If the learners can contribute promptly and the teachers can adjust their mode of instructions accordingly, both the parties will be able to complete their language mission rewardingly. This paper aims to find out learners’ insights on the responsibilities of a language teacher for an effective classroom, collecting information through a group wise classroom discussion activity participated by university level learners (67 participants) of Bangladesh Agricultural University, which may add some values in the field of EFL research, especially in Bangladesh.

Keywords: EFL learners, language teachers, learners’ views, teachers’ responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

To meet the demands of time, concepts of teaching and learning are changing worldwide. This is also an ultimate truth for English Language teaching-learning scenario and when it is a foreign context, the demand is more dimensional as the main aspect of it i.e. the learners are with a lot of variations (on the basis of age, aptitude, interest etc.).

Now, to become a first-rated teacher overcoming the challenges of EFL context and to fulfill the needs of the learners for achieving the goal of communicative English, caring the views of the learners is treated as one of the major features of classroom practice. Holding the concept in mind, teachers of today’s world feel to improve their teaching strategies by carrying out specific responsibilities in tune with learners’ necessities as ‘becoming an English language teacher means becoming part of a worldwide community of professionals with shared goals, values, discourse, and practices but one with a self-critical view of its own practices and a commitment to a transformative approach to its own role’ [1].

This paper attempts to collect learners’ understandings about a teacher’s responsibilities in language classrooms through some discussion activities. Views of learners on teacher’s responsibilities can be a strong medium for collecting and analyzing useful information about learners’ thoughts/ perceptions that can help a teacher to run the course more successfully. Here the teacher also gets the scopes to share or explain

his/her beliefs or s/he can clarify the misconceptions which learners may carry among themselves about the responsibilities a teacher is supposed to perform in classroom. Simultaneously, it can also be a good concept of motivation for the students because when a student finds the teacher values his/her views; it is likely that s/he feels encouraged to explore himself/herself as an active participant of the program which is the main flavor of communicative language teaching and it accelerates learner autonomy.

BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A good number of studies have been undertaken examining the roles or responsibilities of a language teacher. There are also some studies which have put their emphasis on learners’ views for finding out language teachers’ roles and responsibilities.

Language teaching is a complex social and cultural activity. The teacher therefore needs to understand students within their socio-cultural context, quite apart from accepting them as psychologically complex individuals [2]. Basically ‘Students can’t be

“taught” – they can only be helped to learn’ [3]. In a language classroom, ‘...the experiences learners encounter in the learning environment itself shape their identity—either reinforcing already held values and beliefs or reshaping them. Education in general and language learning are not neutral enterprises. Language teachers therefore have responsibility for creating language learning experiences that result in student learning, while valuing learners’ self-identification choices’ [4]. Breen and Candlin [5] reveal that ‘the teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an *independent* participant within the learning-teaching group’. Effective teachers use different strategies to develop a sense of community among their learners, including using group-based activities, by addressing common student interests and concerns, by regularly changing seating arrangements so that students experience working with different classmates, by using humor and other ways of creating a warm and friendly classroom atmosphere, and by recognizing that students have both social as well as learning needs in the classroom [1].

The ESL teacher is:

A good listener who pays attention to his students' experiences, ideas, and feelings and encourages the students to share them with their classmates

A mediator between cultures helping students understand the meaning behind the new social, institutional, and environmental demands they face

A provider of information who alerts students to community resources and systems that are available

A facilitator providing a supportive classroom conducive to problem solving and learning that builds skills and self-esteem

A teacher skilled at helping students acquire the language needed to express themselves and be understood by others [6]

According to Harmer [7] a teacher who is a ‘facilitator’ in a learner centered classroom, will also play the roles of ‘controller’, ‘organizer’, ‘assessor’, ‘promoter’, ‘participant’, ‘resource’, ‘tutor’ ‘observer’. Gardner [8] explains that a language teacher ‘has a number of duties and responsibilities in the language learning context. To achieve their goals, language teachers must have knowledge and skill in the language. On the one hand, this requires that they be sufficiently proficient to have the knowledge and skill to teach the language, and students can quickly determine if the

teacher lacks proficiency. On the other hand, the teacher must have the training, personality characteristics, and ability to teach the fundamentals of the language to the student but also to encourage them to learn the material, and more importantly to use it’.

Studies have also been found on students’ perception of the roles and responsibilities of the teachers. Mainly, ‘...students expect a good English teacher to have the ability to maintain discipline, motivate students, to learn about the learners’ needs and establish good relations with them’ [9] and so, the teacher should ‘show personal attributes such as being nice, friendly, patience, and fair as well as academic elements like making the course more interesting and challenging students academically’ [10]. Taking the most prominent qualities noted by the participants into account, the profile of an effective foreign language teacher can be established as one who:

1. exhibits fairness in decision-making;
2. is successful in reducing students’ anxiety;
3. demonstrates enthusiasm;
4. teaches pronunciation well;
5. teaches speaking skills adequately;
6. has a sound knowledge of vocabulary;
7. teaches reading skills adequately;
8. has a sound knowledge of grammar;
9. is adept at providing explanations in Turkish (mother tongue);
10. is good at classroom management;
11. Teaches writing skills adequately [11].

Analyzing the responses of the participants of their study, Kourieos and Evripidou [12] point out that ‘... an effective language teacher is no longer considered one who has a directive and authoritarian role in the learning process but one who takes into consideration his/her students’ individual differences, language anxiety, abilities and interests and design learning environments accordingly’. Finally, it can be said that a teacher should be a good blend of academic knowledge, effective teaching strategies, a morally and ethically enhanced personality, etiquettes and one stop problem solving techniques as s/he is like a role model to his/her students. A good teacher is like a beacon that learners follow in their path of education. Instead of being a sage on the stage, s/he needs to come down to the learners’ level and work as a guide on the side.

METHODOLOGY

For conducting the study, data was collected through group discussion activity where 67 language learners took part. The setting was the language lab of the Dept. of Languages, Bangladesh agricultural University. All participants were tertiary level learners (20-24 years old) who took a course on Advanced Communicative English offered by the same Department. The selected topic for group discussion was ‘*Responsibilities of the teacher and learners in an English language classroom to make it effective with a*

friendlier environment'. Total 20 groups were formed; 13 groups consisted of 3 students and 7 groups consisted of 4 students. Some characteristics related to a teacher's responsibility were provided to facilitate their activity which included- *teachers' knowledge, behavior, language, personality, sincerity and punctuality*. Participants were given a briefing on how they had to carry out the task. They had to proceed for more organized group discussion keeping some questions into consideration related to each aspect like-

- What types of knowledge should a teacher have?
- How do you expect your teacher's behavior in classroom?
- What types of language (formal, informal, clear etc.) do you think your teacher should use in classroom?
- Discuss some adjectives that define the personality of an effective teacher.
- Which attributes in case of sincerity and punctuality do you expect from your teacher?

Since names and ID numbers of the participants were not asked to mention, they got full freedom to share their true feelings without biasness. In addition to the provided points, they also talked on some more attributes (as allowed) which they brought up through thought sharing with other group mates. After completing their discussions and presentations, group based written documents were collected and analyzed critically to use purposefully for the study. In this study, learners' thoughts on '*responsibilities of the teacher*' were used and their thoughts on '*responsibilities of learners*' were used for another research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge

Knowledge beyond academic subjects and of surroundings or at least some fundamental knowledge about other relevant subjects are also essential to be an effective teacher. A teacher must carry good grammatical knowledge so that s/he can be able to deliver lectures perfectly with good presentation skills. For perfect teaching, beside academic knowledge, clear knowledge about the qualities of students, their behaviors and social environments are also very vital.

Content knowledge refers to what teachers need to know about what they teach (including what they know about language teaching itself), and constitutes knowledge that would not be shared by teachers of other subject areas [1]. Students expect effective instructors to have knowledge of the subject area in which they teach above and beyond course objectives. Students expect faculty to have the ability to communicate freely about their subject area, possess a strong background in the area; inspire confidence by serving as a student resource, elicit student interest, and have the ability to respond to students' problems [13]. Teachers should know that students value teacher preparation very highly. Good preparation builds an atmosphere of mutual respect and motivates the students. A well-prepared teacher has clear lesson objectives and procedures, and ensures that all the materials are ready and prepared so that each lesson runs smoothly [14].

Undoubtedly it is a prerequisite for a language teacher to contain proper knowledge on the subject or topic s/he is going to teach. In this present study, while talking on the above mentioned issue, learners have put their thinking in these ways- it is the responsibility of a teacher to be highly educated and well trained having clear conceptions on the subject s/he is going to teach. Unquenchable thirst to gain knowledge by keeping it up-to-date (mentioned by group 10, 12 & 13) is always expected. The teacher needs to study before coming to the class every time. S/he needs to have adequate (group 16, 18 & 20), sufficient (group 1, 2, 17, 19), depth (group 4, 7 & 15), clear (group 3, 5, 8, 11 & 14) and vast (6 & 9) knowledge about the subjects/topics to be discussed in class so that it can influence learners to follow the teacher. Below is a chart that shows the participants' responses in case of different types of a teacher's knowledge in percentage.

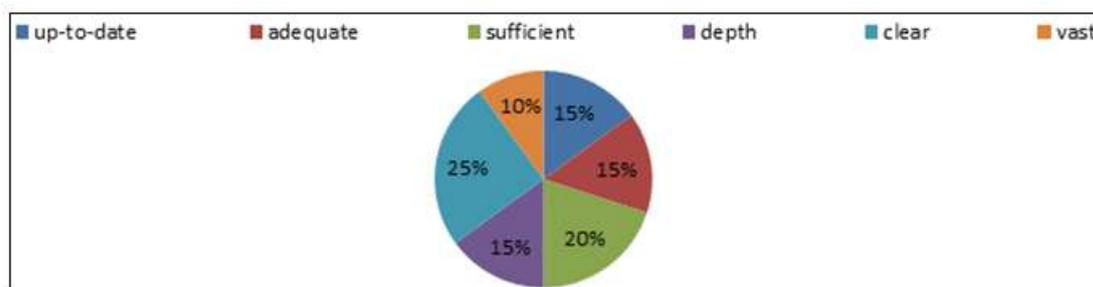


Fig-1: Types of a teacher's Knowledge mentioned by learners

Learners' concepts on the criterion '*knowledge*' make it clear that, today's learners wish for discovering the world more where they like to find their teachers proficient and knowledgeable enough not only about the subject matter but also about other related subjects. They also feel that, being caring about teaching as well as learning community is also a part of a teacher's responsibility.

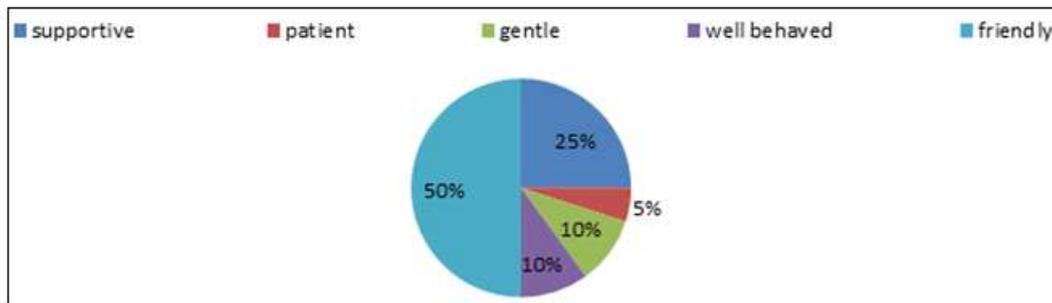


Fig-2: Attributes related to a teacher’s Behavior noted by learners in percentage

Behavior

In Liando [10], ‘both students and teachers believed that there were certain verbal and nonverbal behaviors teachers perform in class which could be the source of motivating as well as de-motivating for students in learning’. When the teacher is positive—encouraging initial and repeated attempts—the students will apply themselves more diligently. Motivation thrives on success [15].

Participants of this study believe that, a teacher’s behavior should always be in such a way that makes the students feel free for learning from him/her. Avoidance of rough behavior, that hurts learners, is a must where his/her role is nothing but a supportive teacher. His/her behavior will show learners the perfect ways of behaving with others. A teacher needs to be supportive (mentioned by group 2, 7, 14, 16 & 20), patient (group 18), gentle (group 4 & 11), well behaved (group 10 & 12) and friendly (group 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19) who will never mock at his learners’ mistakes.

Now it is well understood that, learners undoubtedly desire a well behaved teacher who will be the icon for them to practice good behavior with others.

Language

According to Walsh [16], ‘teachers need to be made more aware of the importance of appropriate language use in the EFL classroom. Clearly, communication with students is essential in effective teaching’. To communicate successfully, teachers must know how to structure their own language output for maximum clarity and have strategies for understanding what students are saying since understanding student talk is key to analysis of what students know, how they understand, and what teaching moves would be useful [17]. Teachers must have a working knowledge of academic language and of the particular type of language used for instruction as well as for the cognitively demanding tasks typically found in textbooks, classrooms, assessments, and those necessary for engagement in discipline-specific areas [18].

Students of this study feel that, teacher’s responsibility is to use language which is generally understandable (mentioned by group 1, 3, 9, 10 & 11), situation based (12 & 20) and clear (7, 8, 14, 17 & 19) with simple (group 13& 15) but standard (group 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18) English.

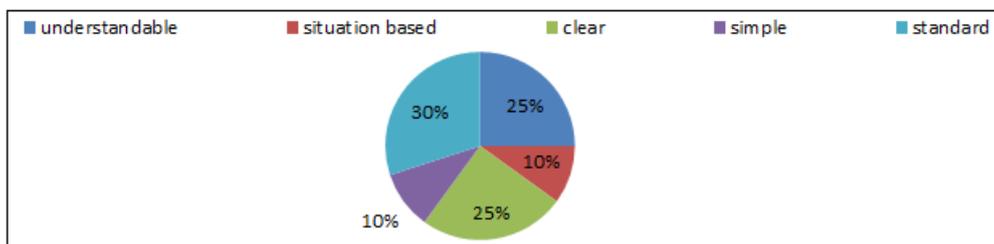


Fig-3: Attributes related to a teacher’s Language mentioned by 20 groups in percentage

Participants also think that, a teacher needs to be fluent and requires mastering correct pronunciation. Avoidance of using local language or slang, whatever the situations arise in classroom, is an important prerequisite as it can hinder to grow up effective and pleasant environment. As an English teacher, language must be English but sometimes Bangla can also be used (in limited ways) for better understanding.

The fact is that, in one way students feel the importance of the perfection of teacher’s English, while on the other hand, they also expect their teacher to bear consciousness about cultural norms of classroom setting where they keep ‘no chance to use slang’.

Personality

It is vital that students get to see the teacher’s personality. They should feel that the teacher, too, is a

“real” and “approachable” person, with a friendly attitude [19]. It is believed that teaching style is fundamentally a matter of personality..... We can only do this if we have a greater awareness of the social psychological reality of the classroom [20].

Learners of this study believe that, a teacher should have impressive (mentioned by group 2, 4 & 6) as well as high personality with sound morality (mentioned by 10 & 15). In any classroom room, friendly environment is mostly demanded but teacher has to be strict in some cases like being friendly during discussion or for listening to learners’ problems and, if needed, be strict (group 5, 9, 11, 12, 16 & 18) in time of controlling class or taking homework etc.

For teachers’ strictness care must be taken as over strictness may make the class boring. So, it is better for teachers to be moderate (group 1, 13 & 14) and flexible (group 3, 7, 8, 17, 19 & 20) in the form of a ‘strict friend’.

Communicating with smiling face and carrying a broad mind are also necessary for maintaining teaching qualities. If s/he possesses a rigid personality, the learners will be afraid and will feel hesitated to ask any question on the topic and ultimately the lecture will be ineffective. The teacher needs to fill up the traditional gap between him/her and the students but some considerations in time of bridging the relationship also need to be taken into consideration so that students never cross their limitations / boundary of the friendly relationship.

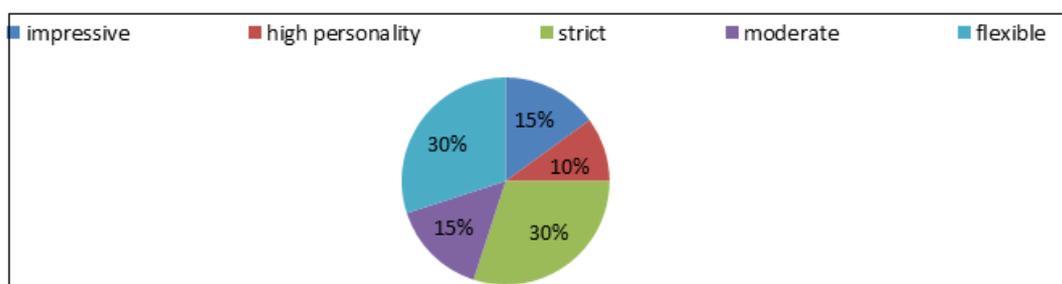


Fig-4: Teacher’s attributes related to personality in percentage

All these prove that, students expect a teacher with good personality who also carries a moral character whom they like to address as a ‘strict-friend’. These also clear that, learners undoubtedly desire a teacher who will be the mentor for them to show how the personality should be formed.

Sincerity and Punctuality

An effective lecturer is one who is perceived as one who: is knowledgeable in the subject area, has personality attributes that promote rapport with students, is organised, punctual, delivers well prepared lectures, gives clear explanations, gives out handouts and extra reading materials, is fair and actively engages students in the learning process [21].

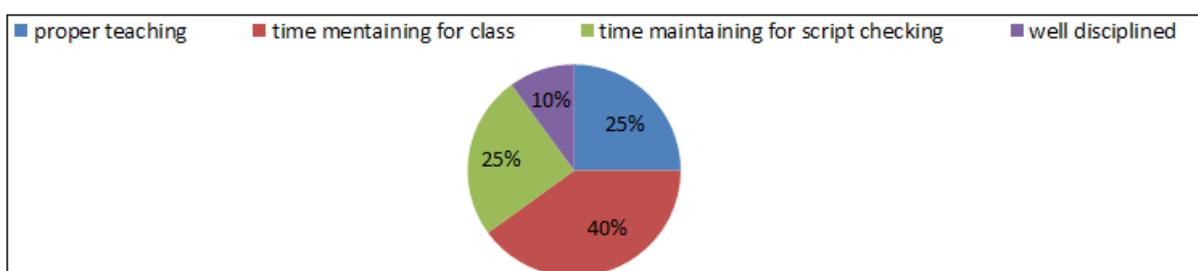


Fig-5: Sincerity and Punctuality related attributes discussed by the participants

This is essential for a teacher to make himself an ideal person whom learners can follow with respect and can obey all time. A teacher should always be sincere and punctual about teaching and evaluation processes i.e. about proper teaching (mentioned by group 4, 6, 11, 17 & 18), time maintaining for class (group 3, 5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15 & 20) as well as about time maintaining for script checking (group 2, 7, 9, 16 & 19). It is fundamental for a teacher to be well disciplined (1 & 10) to set the exemplary platform for

students to attend classes in time. S/he should not be biased at all and should pay attention to all students equally so that they can feel motivated for learning. S/he must prepare himself/herself fully for the class where during class time full concentration only is on the class rather than other personal areas or interests of the teacher.

Students’ views make the point noticeable that, a good teacher’s responsibility is to become sincere

about class or lecture. Similarly s/he must bear a fair mentality which will always boost up the mode of great teaching and learning.

Learners of this study, besides talking on the criteria given by the teacher, also include some more necessary points which they think should be considered as a teacher's responsibilities i.e.-

- i) Proper guidance for every learner especially for the weak students should be ensured as it is the right way of making them highly motivated for learning the language.
- ii) A teacher needs to collect feedback from learners about his/her teaching style.
- iii) The teacher should use modern technology which enhances learning process as Richards [1] finds, 'the use of technology in teaching becomes more important in present times because teachers also have to be able to keep up with the technological knowledge of their students. Young learners today have more access to information and more tools available to them to manage their own learning'.
- iv) Confident teachers both in voice and speech are highly valued as it is an important aspect for learners' confidence building. A teacher needs to maintain good eye contact to draw all learners' attention from front to back and left to right of the classroom.
- v) A co-operative teacher both for solving academic and sometimes crucial non-academic i.e. very personal, emotional problems is noted as effective by the students/participants.
- vi) Avoidance of lengthy and monotonous lecture that helps grow learning interest need to be considered by the teacher.
- vii) A teacher needs to create a system to monitor individual learner's performance regularly.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

Being a teacher means helping people to learn – and, in a student-centered class, the teacher is a member of the class as a participant in the learning process [3]. This study aimed to find out the thoughts of the adult learners about the responsibilities of the language teachers. Considering the analysis of literature it is easily understandable that whatever the context is (Bangladesh or other countries), students hold some common expectations from their teachers i.e. teachers will be punctual, sincere, language expert. This is no more an exception for Bangladeshi learners. They also carry more or less the same concept with some exceptions, where they like to get their teachers as their role model in both of their academic and social lives. So, the teachers should also take into consideration of

their learners' beliefs for the successful meeting with the target of teaching and learning. These responsibilities may also be the examples of effective teaching criteria for any teacher of any level, not only for the EFL/ESL teachers. This research is an initiative to bring out learners thoughts about their teachers' duties and responsibilities only in case of teaching. However, more research should be conducted to get better ideas.

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