EFFECTS OF NATIVE CULTURE ON LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN BAGLADESH: A CASE STUDY

Rowshon Ara

Eastern University, Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1205, Bangladesh. E-mail: rowshon@easternuni.edu.bd

ABSTRACT

Culture, while learning a language, plays a vital role. Culture of the target language is given much importance in learning. However, the native culture interference is also not neglected. This study speculates whether native cultural aspects, like students' religious beliefs, students' geographical background, student teacher relationship, teaching system and class size affect learning English as a foreign language in Bangladesh. Through a survey on 200 students from two private universities and an intense one on one interview of 9 teachers of one university, data is collected for this mixed method study of qualitative and quantitative research . The results are discussed in light of Sapir Whorfian theory, which has never been tested in the context of Bangladesh and Interculturality is used as a theoretical basis to emphasize on the solutions. Recommendations are made for the teachers so that they would find out possible solutions and help students to overcome the barriers caused due to cultural differences. According to the students, the most affective factor that creates a barrier in learning English is teacher-student relationship with teaching system being the second and students' geographical background being the third affective factor. Teacher interviews solidify these findings. Along with these barriers teachers opine that students' religious belief, and class size also play major roles as cultural barriers in learning English as a foreign language with most of the students being unaware of these issues. Well trained Teachers as instructors and culture bridging materials could minimize cultural barriers in learning English as a foreign language in Bangladesh. More exposure to the target culture as well as raising awareness of the issues related to cultural barriers help learners enhance the knowledge of the world and enable co-ordinate with the linguistic as well as cultural factors of learning a foreign language.

Key words: Language, culture, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, mediation of culture, EFL learning

1. INTRODUCTION

"Language and culture are not separate but are acquired together with each providing support for the development of the other" (Mitchell, 2004). Language is the mirror of the culture behind it. As such, inclusion of culture while teaching a second or a foreign language is out of doubt now. However, the impact of native language culture must also be considered. While teaching and learning English, teachers as well as learners in Bangladesh face some problems caused by the native language culture. The culture backing up Bangla language has a community following a "collection of social beliefs, values, religion, credence and ideologies accepted by most members" (Amin, 2015). Language barriers are created by the inherent culture of the native language. While learning English in Bangladesh, these cultural factors impact the effective

oflearning of the language.Zhang, Ollila and Harvey (1998), define the relationship of education and culture saying that children become literate within their cultural communities and within their families. Cultural background works here as an essential feature of a person's individual identity. They also assert that this identity interact with the education received by him in a particular society. The attempt in this study is to find out whether these cultural factors create any effect to hamper learning English as a foreign language for Bangladeshi learners or not.

Significance of the Study

The Researcher, as a faculty of the department of English, has real life experience of how a lack of cultural awareness of both native and target culture hampers students from expressing themselves in English. Her action research at English language classes encouraged her to come up with the assumptions that reasons of general language failure of EFL students at the tertiary level in Bangladesh is deep rooted tonative culture effects that need be addressed along with the target language culture. The study provides important and useful information to the stakeholders i.e.policy makers and English language teachers in Bangladesh and all over the world to decide on the effect of native culture on EFL teaching and learning and also learners, who need to consciously set aside the native cultural values in order to appreciate the target culture and language. Success of this study will provide new insights for teachers, policymakers as well as students to consider native language culture while teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

Research Question

The study asks a question dealing with five issues:
1. To what extent doteaching system, class size, teacher student relationship, student's geographical background and religious belief of the students leave cultural impact on learning English as a foreign language in Bangladesh?

Assumptions

1. At the private universitiesevery semester students take admission from the city and also from outside the city. Students coming from the cities are more facilitated with advanced technologies like internet and updated gadgets than students coming from outside the cities leavingimpacts of student's geographical background on his/her learning EFL in Bangladesh.Teachers face problems in EFL class in Bangladesh as anormal EFL class in Bangladesh has more than 30 students. Teachers are unable to provide ample time and opportunities of practice to each students.The teaching system used in Bangladesh causes an added barrier to EFL learning as teachers are not well trained and aware of the methods and materials need be used for effective learning.Moreover, communication on a personal or professional level can be hampered due to one's religious beliefs and values. Often they cause a difference in attitudes between the male and female students in classroom learning. The traditional belief on teacher–student relationship is a cultural barrier in Bangladesh, for teachers herealways hold a respectable position and learners accept them as the supreme authority. Teachers need play an active role to reduce these effects.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Relation of Language and Culture

Language and culture have a binding relationship to each other. To understand a culture specific expression of a language, an understanding of the cultural behaviors relating to that

language is a requirement. The meaning that a language conveys is determined by its culture. A language is meaningful because of the strong cultural background it has.

"Knowing the cultural reasoning behind language use can provide learners with an outsider view of the culture" (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010:218). Hymes, in Grumperz and Hymes (1964), strongly opines that a language is not learnt or acquired in isolated contexts, rather is learnt through real life communication in societies which are bound with their cultural value. While studying a language, learners gain knowledge and understanding of the culture related to that language. To learn a language well learners need to learn the cultural contexts of that language well (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, p.27). Kniffka (2001) suggests that foreign language education for the adults requires more expertise in and concern for awareness of cultural issues.

Americans avoid silence for they hate it but Japanese people seek silence and quiet for they value peace. Members of these cultures behave in this manner for their cultures defined the concepts in such manner to them and they are conditioned to follow (Doi, 1973). Without awareness of the non-linguistic aspects that exert such strong influence on language and intercultural communication, understanding of the other cultures is a far cry. While learning a language, culture must be treated as a vital component. Teachers of English must include the important cultural aspects in the curriculum while teaching English to speakers of other language. This will bring success to speaking of English as cultural aspects influence the meaning of a language at a great extent.

2.2. Sapir Whorfian Hypothesis

"Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation." (Sapir, 1958:69).

Edward Sapir suggested that language and culture are such closely bound that one cannot be understood without an understanding of the other. In his book *Language* he defines the relationship of language and culture as a result of his studies on Native American languages. Long before him, a distinguished German linguist, Wilhelm Von Humboldt stumbled at a similar view in 1820 in his "Weltanschauung" (world-view) hypothesis focusing on the determining role of language on thought (Brown, 1968).

Edward Sapir and his disciple Benjamin Whorf, define that language has a powerful hold on the thought process of a human being. The theory has two parts with it: linguistic determination and linguistic relativity. Linguistic determination says that from personal thoughts and behavior to general thoughts and behavior of the society everything is defined and expressed by the language used by human beings. Linguistic relativity says no two languages are similar to each other. They are different because the defining factors, the cultures behind the languages are different to each other and these cultures mold the thought processes of their users. This is why the speech of one language user is not understood by the user of another language. While Sapir focuses on linguistic determinism, Whorf formulates a more radical form of linguistic relativism.

Sapir never denies the objective world around us but Whorf states that the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux which provide impressions organized by the linguistic system present in our minds. This denies the objectivity of the world and gives it a more subjective tone. Whorf extended Sapir's idea through a "predisposition" saying that the relationship of language and culture is something deterministic. He strongly states that, "the background linguistic system of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of mental stock in trade. Formulations of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs from slightly to greatly, between different grammars.   We dissect nature along lines laid by our own native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena, we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary , the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.(Carroll,1956, pp.212-14). This is the basis of Whorf's, metalinguistic theory on the relationship of languages, thought and culture. On language and thought he believed that "the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systemizations of his own language" (Steiner, 1972, p.20). About language and culture he said that "in main (language and culture) had grown up together, constantly influencing each other" (Carroll, 1956, p.156).This hypotheses, in later times was divided by scholars in "linguistic determinism" and "linguistic relativism". In the theoretical world Sapir-Whorf hypotheses has raised heated discussions since its inception. Though Bennett (1998) works as a strong proponent of the hypotheses, some of his arguments were not accepted well.Hoijer (1994) opposes the hypotheses for he believes in the fundamental similarities of different cultures. In his words these similarities arise, "in part from diffusion and in part from the fact that all cultures are built around biological, psychological and social characteristics common to all mankind". Hoijer (1994), accuses that the hypotheses exaggerated the relationship of language, thought and culture and that this over exaggeration on linguistic difference rejects the possibility of cross-cultural communication. Penn (1972), reflects on the hypotheses saying that it is used "more and less strongly at different places" (p.13) and that those supporting the hypotheses are always in a dilemma and are "unable to make assertions about reality because of doubting (their) own ability to correctly describe reality" (p. 33) for they are bound by their own language. Furthermore, it is also accused by linguists that the predetermining role of language on thought denies the possibility of second language acquisitions and translation from one to the other culture. People from different language communities and cultures can never understand each other. Even though members of the same community are bound by the same language they perceive the objective world in different ways due to other affective factors. Moreover, the hypothesis fails to explain how people at times come across thoughts impossible to explain through native words. Linguists suggest that language and thought should not only be defined by linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism rather should also be considered in terms of historical, social and cultural background.

On the other hand, Sapir- Whorf hypotheses does not entirely deny the possibilities of cross cultural communication when Whorf suggests studying other languages to understand other cultures. Credit must be given to Sapir and Whorf for their research on indigenous languages that

brought out cultural diversities and also a different mode of thoughts regarding the domination of the Indo-European language systems. He mentions, "To restrict thinking to the patterns merely of English, and especially to those patterns which represent the acme of plainness in English, is to lose power of thought which, once lost, can never be regained. … Western culture has made, through language, a provisional analysis of reality and, without correctives, hold resolutely to that analysis as final. The only corrective lie in all those other tongues which by eons of independent evolution have arrived at different, but equally logical and provisional analyses" (Carroll, 1956, p. 244). Thus the hypotheses attempts to promote cultural diversity keeping it away from cultural hegemony. Fu (2003), echoes saying that while learning a new language, a learner, along with the learning of vocabulary and grammar, needs to reconstruct his /her thinking patterns in order to adjust to new language patterns (p.135). So, it still possesses some significance in the globalized world today. In the fields of social science, linguistics, philosophy, history and cognitive science the theory can pose great significance for research on the relations of language, thought and culture. Even though different people see the world differently, they are unable to express themselves without the help of a language. Supporting Sapir- Whorf hypotheses, Fishman (1972) explains the demands of the hypotheses saying that when the speakers of one language has certain vocabulary to define certain concepts and if speakers of other language lack similar vocabulary, it gets easier for the speakers of the first language to explain the concepts. As for example: the technical terms used at different sciences. The distinctive features of one language, lacking in another, enables speakers of the first language to perceive the differences of concepts in the other language. Hussein (2012), concludes in his study that, "Whorf may not have been right on all counts, but he was not wrong either. The fact that language plays a role in shaping our thoughts, in modifying our perception and in creating reality is irrefutable". He also mentions that even though positive supports to the hypothesis are few and that "the search for linguistic universals has been intensified, it will be impossible to determine what is universal, if we do not know what is particular".

This theory so far has been applied to define the relations of language and culture. It has also been criticized and demeaned but Sapir's hypothesis has never been tested in the context of Bangladesh. The relationship of language and culture is undeniable. Keeping this in mind in this study an attempt is made to apply Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis to understand the impacts of native culture in learning English in Bangladesh. The theory in action at a totally new setting may bring out novel implications.

2.3. Native language interference on the foreign /second language learning

"In the field of foreign language teaching one aspect that occasionally emerges as a topic of discussion is the relationship between knowledge of a foreign language, and knowledge of the culture from which that language "originated" (Tang, 1999). Second /foreign language can be learnt in two ways: acquisition and learning. Second or foreign language acquisition is not different from first language acquisition. Learners acquire the language in natural settings. Krashen (1982, 10) defines acquisition of a language as "subconscious process" in which learning is "implicit", "informal" and "natural".

But learning a second or a foreign language in a different native language setting is a lot different than acquiring them. Learning is "conscious knowledge of a second language", "knowing the rules", "being aware of them" and "being able to talk about them" (Krashen, 1982, 10). It is not a natural process and learning takes place in a more academic and self-conscious manner.

While learning a second or a foreign language, aspects of native language create barriers. The barriers can be linguistic as well as cultural. In the field of Anthropology and Linguistics it

is long accepted that cultural aspects of a society or nation are reflected through the language or languages that people of that society speak. Classroom learning of a foreign or second language requires more than linguistic competence. It requires cultural competence or awareness of the culture of the target language along with linguistic competence. Learners should know behaviors, manners, and customs etc. that are culturally appropriate to the foreign language. This will reduce a considerable percentage of classroom alienation for the learner in EFL class. Brown (2001, 65), assumes that native language exercises an interfering effect on the target language most of the times. Ellis (1997, 51), defines native language impacts or "interference" as "transfer". Transfer is "the influence that learner's first language exerts over the acquisition of a second language". He also mentions that when learners make "errors" that normally reflect their lack of knowledge in the language that they are learning. Learning a second or foreign language becomes easier if the linguistic systems and the cultural aspects are closer to those of the first language. Bangla and Hindi are very close in their linguistic systems and Bangladesh and India are very closely located, needless to mention they were parts of the same country at one time in history. So learning Hindi as a foreign language for a Bangladeshi learner is much easier than learning English. English has a totally different linguistic system and also the language has a different cultural background. " While the native system will exercise both facilitating and interfering effects on the production and comprehension of the new language, the interfering effects are likely to be the most salient" (Brown, 2001, 66). The factors that interfere a foreign language learning are discussed next.

2.4. Student –teacher relationship

Learners in Bangladesh learn English only through reading and writing. In schools and colleges they practice very little listening and no speaking at all. Farooqui (2007) asserts that in Bangladesh, "students do not like to become engaged in conversation or play communication games. They refuse to speak English to each other." She blames the traditional attitude towards teachers and teaching system, saying, "There is a long tradition of unconditional obedience to authority in these countries. They expect teachers to be authority figures and the teaching method to conform to the traditional teacher- centered approach." For successful communicative-competence in English these problems need to be solved.

2.5. Teaching system and materials

Methodology and materials are major factors of language teaching in the teaching system. Effective methodology and materials are required for teaching English as a foreign language. In this regard learners' practical need for English in the society must be kept in mind. Harmer (2007) distinguishes between a learner's need for English as a foreign language learner and his knowledge of that language. While learning English not only grammatical rules and vocabulary is enough. A learner needs to know how to use the language pragmatically. Curriculum must be developed to fulfill student's need.

2.6. Class size

Harmer (2000), reports that large classes generally cause difficulty of teaching as well as learning and in particular, affect teachers and learners, as teachers find it difficult to arrange effective activities and promote creativity. They also find it problematic to keep in touch with all the students and pay attention to those sitting at the back of the class. A well-managed classroom in school will affect the success of a foreign language learning. Learning English in a classroom environment with a good number of students (maximum 20) will provide better opportunities for individual learning. On the other hand, in some cultures, classes are normally large in size with

more than 40 students. Large classes create barriers to learning, limiting opportunities of individual learning with the crowdedness. Brown (2001), suggests that in a language teaching classroom there should not be more than 12 students. In Bangladesh a normal class has around 30/40 students in it for which teaching and learning both becomes a challenge while learning English as a foreign language.Siddique (2004) in his study focused on the fact that in Bangladesh the main challenges of the students are administrative set up, teacher- centered classrooms , large classes and cultural conflicts. Chowdhury and Shaila (2011) add to this saying that large classes, lack of confidence and shyness from the student side, and a lack of communicative and cooperative learning environment hampers students' learning and speaking in English.

2.7. Student's geographical background

Students having more exposure to the language are likely to be more successful in English as a foreign language learning than those who have less exposure. Students living in an English speaking community have more chances to practice the language than those who live in a non-English speaking community. In Bangladesh students living in urban areas have more exposure to English due to media and internet than students living in rural areas. Farooqi (2014), in her study complains that, "teachers in rural areas could not teach in English because they thought the students did not have the ability to understand English". She also mentions that most of the students in schools are from uneducated families and they do not get any help from their family in learning English. They only learn English in schools. Whereas in urban areas, educated parents can help their children in learning English outside the classroom and also send their children for private tuition to learn English better. The proficiency level of the English teachers in the rural areas is also a major drawback in learning English. As Haider and Chowdhury (2012,) reveal that in rural areas, "teachers have a tendency of slipping into Bangla after starting a sentence in English" (17). Thus all the good attempts to establish an effective curriculum and the timetable failed to set a standard of English language learning especially among the rural students (Rahman 1991, Hoque 1996).

2.8. Religious belief

Religion, as defined by Geertz (1973), is "a system which acts to establish persuasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." He sees religion as a "cultural system" made of symbols and further defines that "religion on one hand anchors the power of our symbolic resources for formulating analytic ideas on and authoritative conception of the overall shape of reality, so on another side it anchors the power of our, also symbolic, resources for expressing emotions-moods, sentiments, passions, affections, feelings – in a similar conception of its persuasive tenor, its inherent tone and temper (104). Religious culture plays a major role in the lives of people having a stern religious belief. It is formed by the religious belief of the nation. Religious belief of one nation can cause cultural differences of taboo for other nations. Learner's religious belief can, in a very subtle and implicit way, be a factor to affect learning English as a foreign language. Amin (2015) in a study finds out that "religious factors are partially effective on ELT". Religion and education go hand in hand. We know that from the beginning of religions, education became a tool to spread moral values. Education has been shaping up an ethical and moral society by including religious values explicitly or implicitly in textbooks ranging from language to history. If a learner's religious beliefs are very different than that of the religious beliefs of the English speakers, he/she may find himself in a situation very different and it may be very difficult for him to accept. As for example a reference to "life beyond death" is known

by a Chinese person as "after life" or return of life. On the other hand, to a believer of Islam or Christianity, the meaning is to "return to the almighty in heaven or hell". Here a misunderstanding of meaning cannot be avoided due to differing religious culture. Some religious beliefs sometimes are so deep rooted, they cannot be set aside to have space to appreciate and learn about the religious beliefs of others. People in Bangladesh follow Islam. Islamic rules, manners and attitudes are different from that of the English speaking countries. So a difference of interpretation may occur to create an obstacle to learn English as a foreign language. Cheng and Beigi (2012), in their study show how the Iranian government strictly prohibits any cultural representation of English in the EFL textbooks in Iran because of the religious restrictions. English language is taught through the cultural representation of Iran leaving a clear lack of understanding of the culture behind English. Though the authors reason this through the concept of identity and nation building, a clear effect of the religious culture of Iran is understandable on EFL learning.

Finding the unfriendly and non-supportive environment, the Bangladeshi students are losing their motivation in learning spoken English. As a result, the students who have a minimum interest to speak loose it. "Most of the Bangladeshi students are very reluctant to speak in English irrespective of their proficiency in one or the other skill" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4).

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a case study. According to Punch (2005), a "case study aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and its context" (p.144). The methods used in this study are "mixed methods" by Creswell (2003).He puts much emphasis on this third kind of methods mentioning, 'to include only qualitative and quantitative methods falls short of the major approaches being used today in the social and human sciences(4).' Quantitative data collection for this research, at first, is planned by the researcher be done through an online survey. She prepares the survey questionnaire in <http//: www.surveymonkey.com> as, according to Brown(2001), questionnaires are "cheap, quick and efficient" and by assuring anonymity, makes participants feel comfortable when they respond to sensitive issues (p.77). A number of 200 students participate in the study. Students in their classes at universities are given the link of the particular webpage to fill in the survey. The researcher takes care that all the questions are answered. On different days she collects data from University A and B. From University A, a total number of 140 students and from University B a total number of 60 students participate in this survey.

3.1. Sample students Participants

The sample participants of this study are first semester freshman students of two Private Universities in Dhaka city. The chart and tables below show demographic information of students' age, number and gender.

Figure 1: Student identification chart

Answer Choices	Responses	
Male	61.50%	123
Femae	38.50%	77
Total		200

Figure 2: Student age chart
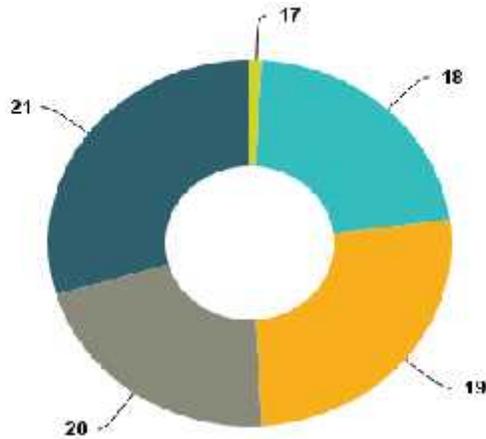
140 students participated from one university and rest 60 from another university. The range of their age is from 17 to 21 and they are all first year students across different departments. Only 1% student in the survey were the age of 17.

3.2. Identification of the teacher participants

Nine teachers from a private university provided their opinions through face to face interviews. All these teachers have 3- 30 years of EFL teaching experience at college and university level. The interviews are semi-structured, individual, and open ended. Teachers are asked pre-determined open ended questions with other questions and suggestions emerging in the process of discussion. Apart from their expert opinions on the problems probed into this study, they provided solutions to those problems from their knowledge and experience.

3.3. Procedure

Qualitative data for this research is collected through semi-structured open ended interviews of nine teachers of the department of English from University A. They are asked 7questions related to the topics of the survey. Each of the teachers gave their expert opinions and shed lights on further related issues. Their opinions clarify problems highlighted in this study and also focus light on the path of supposed solutions.

To keep the data collection process transparent and gain authentic dataa conscious ethical effort is made the researcher. Other than giving them meanings of the questions learners are not influenced in any way to bias the study.

4. FINDING

Teaching system, class size, religious belief, students' geographical background and teacher student relationship are cultural factors that may create barriers to learning English. Students were asked if the following factors of the native culture affect learning EFL or not. They were given the option to answer in the positive or in the negative. Thebar chart below shows results ofthis survey.

Figure 3: Factors affecting EFL
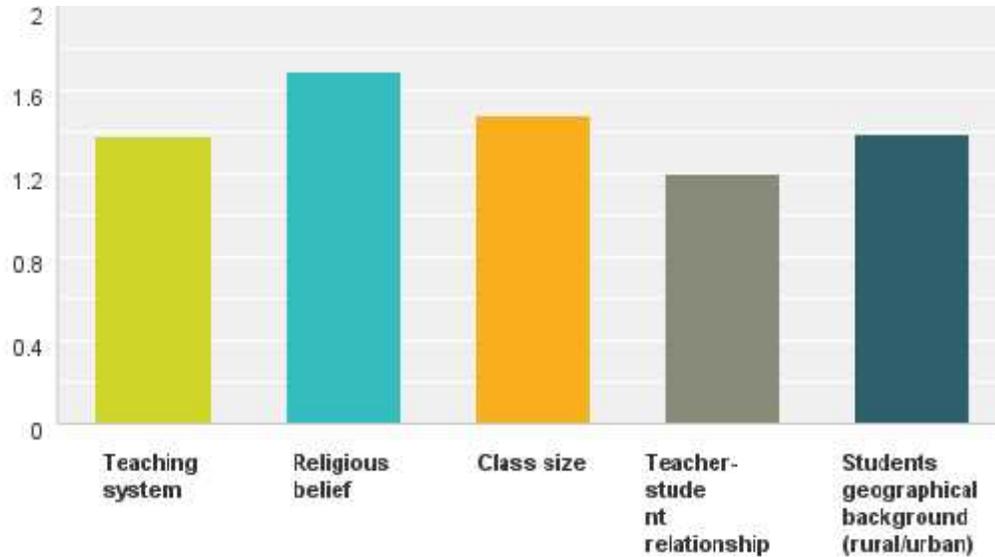
	yes	no	Total	Weighted Average
Teaching system	62.50% 125	37.50% 75	200	1.38
Religious belief	31.28% 61	68.72% 134	195	1.69
Class size	52.06% 101	47.94% 93	194	1.18
Teacher-student relationship	80.30% 159	19.70% 39	198	1.20
Students geographical background (rural/urban)	60.51% 118	39.49% 77	195	1.39

Teacher Interview results

Based on the questions asked teacher interview information is provided below:

Q.1 Do you think native culture has any effect in EFL learning in Bangladesh?

All nine of the teachers unanimously agreed that native culture (Bangla culture) have effect on learning English as a foreign language in Bangladesh. They accepted that Bangla and English culture have significant differences.

Q.2 Do your studentsface any problem in EFL classroom regarding the materials you use?

Teacher responses are summed up below:

Table 1: Teacher interview information 1

Response of teachers	Number of teachers	%
Culturally different topics create a barrier	8	89%
Student's lack of linguistic proficiency is also barrier	1	11%

Q.3 Does teaching system in Bangladesh create any problem in EFL class?

All excepting one teacher answered in the positive. They also provided more insight on the issue:

1.Teacher must be able to use effective methodology in class

2. Teacher must connect with students, makes learning enjoyable, explains, engageand motivate students to understand and accept cultural differences

3. One teacher uses method of comparison to bridge aspects of native and target culture.

4. Often interactive method causes confusion among students

5. Most of the teachers at tertiary level come from a literature background without any prior training on EFL teaching.

Q.4 Does class size cause a problem in EFL class?

Teachers unanimously answered in the positive. Some more insightful information came out: 1. In speaking class more than 30 students cannot speak

2.Along with the number of students,space in classroom is also a problem

3.Students with poor language level requires individual attention which is impossible in a large class

4. If teacher is well trained and serious no problem arises

Q.5 Does teacher-student relationship affect EFL learning in any way?

All nine of the teachers unanimously agreed that a good rapport between a teacher and student plays a vital role in EFL learning and teachers must be very proficient. While discussing on teacher-student relationship in Bangladesh, teachers gave out some insightful information:

1. Our culture tells there should be distance between teacher and student. The cultural gap gives away the idea that teacher student cannot be friendly

2. Students seek help from teachers when they need but due to the existing idea on teacher authority do not feel free

3.Teachers should break this barrier and be friendly to make class interactive

Q.6 Does geographical background have any impact on a student's EFL learning?

Table 2: Teacher interview information 2

Teacher response	Number of teachers	%
Has a major impact on student's EFL learning	6	67%
Does not think it is a problem	1	11%
Students are familiar with native English speaking and culture for the global culture represented through media	1	11%
Irrespective of geographical background students in Bangladesh are unfamiliar to target culture	1	11%

More information gathered from discussion:

1.Urban students are more exposed to English, students in rural areas, even if economically solvent, are not familiar due to lack of exposure

2. Urban students are smarter and it is easier to teach them

3. Learners in rural areas have poor command in English and lack any experience of speaking in English

Q.7 Does religious belief of the student impact EFL learning in Bangladesh?

Table 3: Teacher interview information 3

Teacher response	Teacher number	%
Religious belief impacts EFL learning	**6**	**67%**
Not sure	**3**	**33%**

Open ended discussion brought out the following information:

      1. Since they are from a different religious background it becomes difficult for them to understand the religious aspects related to English

      2. For social and religious reasons girls study in girls' school. Mixing of boys and girls are prohibited so classroom participation becomes embarrassing

      3. Religious belief in Bangladesh molds student's belief

      4. Works more at primary and secondary level but whether active at the tertiary level is doubtful.

5. DISCUSSIONS

      Based on the findings of this study, it is quite clear that the issues center to this study culturally affect teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Bangladesh atvarious degrees. Discussions below clarify the issues with suggestions.

5.1. Student-Teacher Relationship

      From the student survey, Teacher-student relationship emerges out to be the most important problem (80.30%). Only 19.70% believe this is not a problem at all. This is an eye opener for the teachers and also the policy makers. Teachers definitely need to give more importance and work more on their treatment of the students. While learning, Teachers can raise student motivation to ensure a healthy atmosphere between teachers and learners. Teacher's job is to bring students out of their inhibition and motivate them to participate in class. They need to explain the topic at hand to the students for which most of these teachers shall need a careful selection of methods to guide them with linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge. For students who lack motivation, one of the teacher's suggestion may work. She suggested that teachers should boost up student motivation by raising their awareness about the practicality of learning English. Giving the real picture to the students of which level of proficiency they stand and what should be their goal may also help.

      The study emphasizes it is the teacher's responsibility to help students understand about something culturally different to them. While explaining cultural issues to the students, most of the teachers shared their practical experiences of their classes. They try to contextualize and familiarize issues of the target culture through compare and contrast with issues of the native culture. Farabi (2015), in his study suggests about EFL teachers that, "the more they know about cultural differences, the better they are in teaching and the more effective communication between teachers and students become".

      It has been seen in Bangladesh that most teachers tend to keep a distance from their students. The reason could also be that these teachers are also raised within this culture so they are not able to come out of the stereotypical teacher-student relationship. There should be a fine balance between a teacher being friendlier and having control of the class where the students know that they have to follow certain rules in class. But they also know that the teacher is there to help them. This traditional role of the teachers in the curriculum is treated simply but is seriously inadequate for teachers are the authority in class to control, practice and embody the educational concepts of the curriculum in class (Rahman, 1999).

      There should be good "rapport" maintained between a teacher and students to help students learn. Harmer (2007) echoes saying, "We need to establish an appropriate relationship with our students. We need to spend time making sure that teacher-student rapport is positive and useful" (p.113). This way teacher is able to give students what they need and can expect a visible improvement in their achievement. Teacher student relationship plays a major role to bring out the students from their encaged cell to participate in classroom activities. If required teacher

should consult the weak students about their academic and if possible personal issues. This would help break the ice of student teacher relationship. One teacher from the study mentions that he himself helps the weaker students through interpersonal communication. He gives more time for activities to the weaker students and suggests all the students to read English more, watch English movies etc. To understand the language clearly, he suggests his students to use headphones while listening to tape scripts of learning English as a foreign language activities. From the findings and discussion it is clear that teacher's culturally defined role, in Bangladesh, distances him/her from the students and thus affects teaching English as a foreign language.

5.2. Teaching System

"Bangladesh is one of the few countries of the world where teachers can start teaching without any formal training (Siddique, 2004, p. 2)." Clearly this is a negligence in the teaching system. In the study, teaching system turns out to be the second most effective factor in learning English as a foreign language. 62.50% students agree to this. All the teachers unanimously believe that effective teaching method is important in teaching English as a foreign language. Teachers must use culture friendly methodology and also should ensure learning is enjoyable. Teaching and learning culture in Bangladesh is exam oriented. Instead of using effective teaching methodology teachers become syllabus oriented. Teacher's responsibility is to facilitate and encourage students be able to express their inner thoughts by acquiring proficiency on features of the language. But in Bangladesh most of the teachers do not know the correct and effective methods of teaching and rely on their own "eclectic" method of teaching without setting a goal of achievements. Sinha (2001) in her study complains that in Bangladesh teachers in their classroom do not use effective and energetic methods to teach English. They do not prepare well and as a result students lose their interest to participate in spoken English. Moreover, most of the teachers teaching English have literature background with no or very little training on language teaching. They are not aware of effective teaching methodology. Lack of use of effective teaching methodology is hampering learning English for the students in Bangladesh. Hence Teacher training is very important. A study done for the University Grants Commission (UGC) by the British Council in the year 1995 marked two major problems in the progress of English language teaching, both of them blaming teachers for the failure. In recent days the Government of Bangladesh launched a project named the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) in collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID). In this project a network of resource centers will help English teachers with in service training and enable them to prepare proper and effective materials for teaching English in Bangladesh. From this study it is clear that problems due to teacher's lack of training persists and this effort of the Government is a major step towards solution.

5.3. Class size

Sinha (2001) suggested "in a language classroom, we need a limited number of students" (p. 173). But almost all the classes in the public sectors in Bangladesh have as many as 200 students each (Siddique, 2004, p.3). The survey marks 52.06% learners agreeing on class size being a problem. Teachers also agree that class size in the context of Bangladesh is a big problem. A big sized class with lots of students creates difficulty and challenge for teachers, especially for speaking classes. According to Basir and Ferdousy (2006) a class of 45-91 students is regarded as a large classroom. Sinha (2001) calls this a crowded classroom (p. 173). Many language instructors commented that teaching a large class is a major problem (Basir & Ferdousy, 2006). Even though the number of students are more the space in class often is very small in Bangladesh which creates another added problem. Huq (1988), Hoque (1989) and

Khan(1995) report that in Bangladesh class sizes are large and most of the times many students are crammed into a small space. Moreover, students with poor background require more attention which teachers are often unable to provide due to the exceeding number of students in class. Teachers also opined that if teachers are serious and able to use proper methodology, like group work, peer work etc. can reduce the problem with a big class size. Again the emphasis goes on to teaching with effectivemethodology. But it is clear that, in the context of Bangladesh, the number of students in EFL class is a major issue. Kumaravadevelu (2006) felt that proper investigation is required through effective pedagogical methods to address the issue of large classes in the developing countries. He also suggested that this will help teachers to employ suitable strategies in language classrooms.

5.4. Student's Religious Belief

The study says Religious Belief, creates the least problemin EFL learning in class. Most of them (68.72%) opined against it. But the number of students who find this a problem are not few (31.28%).Out of the 200 students 5 skipped the answer.While doing the survey, especially answering this question of religious belief, the researcher came across a very significant reaction form the students. More than once students wondered how this question is related to the topic. This leads to the thought that these students are unaware of how their thoughts and values are constraining them from reaching towards the beliefs and values of the target culture. Most of the teachers mark this as affecting learning English. Mirdehghan (2011) in a study of cultural barriers on the Iranian students found out that religious factors create a "partial barrier" in ELT. Bangladesh and Iran are Muslim countries where more than 80% people follow Islam. So the religious impacts should be similar. Two of the teachers believe that due to social and religious restrictions girls study in girls' school and college and for this girls studying at the tertiary level, especially in speaking class, feel shy to participate in class. The important thing is, students are unaware of the obstacles created by these deep rooted beliefs. To understand and appreciate issues of a different culture requires an awareness of not being biased by one's cultural views rather put it aside to freely able to understand and appreciate the target culture. Teachers, dealing with religious beliefs in EFL class need be conscious of gender issues in Bangladesh.

5.5. Student's Geographical Background

Students' geographical problem, in the study, turns out to be the third biggest problem in learning English as a foreign language with 60.51% students agreeing to it. Also from the teacher interview chart it is clear that this is a major problem. Every semester a good number of students come from rural areas to study in the private universities. Their command over English is far below than the expected level of proficiency at the universities. Even though these students have learnt English for 12 years before coming to universities, they lack linguistic and also cultural familiarity of English due to lack of cultural and linguistic exposure. Hamid (2011), in his research on the English proficiency of the school students of rural areas of Bangladesh blamed the "socioeconomic" factors as a major hindrance in their learning and teaching English. A question rises of the ability of their teachers who taught them in schools and colleges. A speculation on these teachers of the rural areas show that these teachers are not properly trained and also their command over English is poor. Haider and Chowdhury (2012), accuses the teachers of the rural areas saying, " they prefer Bangla as a medium of instruction even for their English lessons due to their poor level of proficiency in English" (p.18). Most proficient teachers do not wish to stay in rural areas for lack of facilities and a descent salary. In rural areas they are not only lowly paid, but also lack a standard of life. As a result, in rural areas of

Bangladesh,teaching staff of English as a foreign language are of lesser quality. Proper training facilities provided by the government may improve the situation.

5.6. Solutions: Learner awareness of Native culture issues and culture friendly materials

From analysis of the teachers' interviews and student survey the issue of learners being unaware of their own cultural aspects causing barriers to language learning emerges out. Social values, attitudes, manners, customs etc. are active at a very subconscious level of human mind. An awareness of theseimplicit but powerful issues would help learners immerse into learning the foreign language better and gradually gain learner autonomy.It is increasingly being promoted as a way to develop learners' ability to negotiate meanings across languages and cultures and prepare them for living in a multicultural world. Byram (1997) proposes on the notion of intercultural competence, referring to 'the ability to decenter and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior' (p. 42). To develop intercultural communication a learner must have a free and open mind to set aside his cultural views and be able to appreciate and accept the cultural views related to the target language. This is such a challenging work and only teachers help in this regard is not enough. Teachers can guide and help the learners but to open up and to accept is the student's responsibility.

More acquaintance with the target culture helps to distinguish the cultural differences between the target culture and the native culture. Consciousness of the taken for grantednative cultural norms and behaviors help learners to accept the behaviors and beliefs of the target culture. Thus a mediation between cultures occur. In this regard, teachers may suggest and support learners to read more of the history, geography, cultural norms, customs, festivals, religion etc. of English culture. Through an understanding and acceptance of the target culture learners of English will be able to use English more efficiently.

To ensure this, English educators will not only need to be more culturally and linguistically aware but also able to design curriculums with an international and multicultural focus. In modern approaches such as Task-Based Language Teaching, Content-Based Language Teaching, and Cooperative Language Teaching, there is great emphasis put on culture and social awareness. In the EFL curriculumin Bangladesh, materials of instruction should be culture friendly to such extent that they are able to bridge between the target culture of English and the native culture of Bangla. Thus a two way purpose will be served, the learner will not only learn the language but also will be able to effectively use English to communicate with speakers of English throughout the world.

6. CONCLUSION

Intercultural communicative competence has become a basic need to communicate in a foreign language. This paper has critically analyzed the cultural aspects supposedly affecting EFL learning in Bangladesh. Students need to develop their cultural knowledge, skills and attitudes required to understand cultural aspects of English and for effective communication and interaction with people from English cultures. In fact, Teachers play the most crucial role in bridging the aspects and norms of native culture and target culture. A shift from a traditional approach to intercultural approach in EFL classrooms will contribute to teachers' professional development for language teaching. It will enhance their awareness of the inextricable and interdependent relationship between language and culture and teaching culture as an integral component of language. It also helps to develop teachers' intercultural perspectives that may have an impact on their language teaching methodology and syllabus design. This shift is a

challenge that EFL teachers and learners have to deal with to meet the goals of foreign language education in our modern world.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S.S. (2006). Communicative English in Bangladesh: A feedback. *Stamford Journal of Bangladesh*, 2, 1- 15.

Amin, A. (2015). Cultural barriers of English Language Teaching and Learning in EFL context. *Research Journal of Recent Sciences*. Vol.4 (1), pp. 32-36.

Basir, A. &Ferdousy, S. (2006). Problems and strategies of teaching English in large classes at Universities in Bangladesh. *Stamford Journal of English*, 2, 38-52.

Bennett, M. J. (1998). *Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Selected readings*. M.A.: Intercultural Press.

Brown, R. (1968). *The psychology of language and communication*. New York: Guilford Press.

Brown, H.D. (2001*). Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. USA: Pearson Education.

Brown, J.D. (2001). *Using Surveys in Language Program*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carroll, J. B. (1956). *Language, thought and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf.* Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press.

Cheng, K.K.Y. and Beigi, A.B. (2012). Education and Religion in Iran: The inclusiveness of EFL(English as a Foreign Language) Textbooks. *Internonal Journal of Educational Development*. Vol-32,310-315.

Chowdhury, N., &Shaila, S.M. (2011). Teaching speaking in large classes: crossing the barriers. *Journal of English*, 6, 68-81.

Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: sage.

Doi, L. T. (1973). The Japanese patterns of communication and the concept of amae. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59(2), 180-185.

Ellis, R. (1997). *Second Language Acquisition*. In *Oxford Introduction to Language   Studies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Farabi, R.A. (2015). Cultural Barriers in English Language Learning: A Socio- linguistic Perspective. *International Research Journal of Inerdisciplinary& Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS).* Vol.1, Issue.V. Pg.71-76.

Farooqui, S. (2007). Developing Speaking Skills of adult learners in private Universities of Bangladesh: problems and solutions. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning.* Vol 47/ Issue 1,   95-109

Farooqui, S. (2014). The Struggle to Teach English: A Case Study in Bangladesh. *Journal of Education and Human Development.* Vol.3, No.2, pp. 441-457.

Fishman, J.A. (1972). *The Sociology of Language: An Interdisciplinary Social Science Approach to Language in Society*. Rowle, Mass.: Newbury House.

Fu, D. (2003). *An island of English: Teaching ESL in Chinatown.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Geertz, C. (1973). Religion as a Cultural System. The Interpretations of Culture. USA: Basic Books, Inc.

Gumperz, J.J. and Hymes, D. (1964). "The Ethnography of Communication". *Special Issue of American Antrophologist 66 (6.2)*

Haider, M.Z., Chowdhury,T.A. (2012). Repositioning of CLT from curriculum to classroom: A review of English language instructions in Bangladeshi secondary schools. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2(4), 12-22.

Hamid, M. O. (2011). Socio-economic characteristics and English language achievement in rural Bangladesh. *Bangladesh-e Journal Sociology*. 8(2)

Harmer, J. (2000). *How to Teach English*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman

Hoijer, H. (1994). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 194-200). Belont, C.A.: Wadsworth.

Hoque, M. S. (1989). The present state of English teaching in Bangladesh. *BELTA Journal* 1/5: 65-76

Hoque, M. S. (1996). Quality Assurance in English Language Teacher Training: A Bangladesh Case Study. Paper presented at the Conference on 'Quality Assurance for Distance Learning'. Sheffield, September 1996.

Hussein, B.A. (2012). The Sapir – Whorf Hypothesis Today. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. Vol, 2, No. 3, pp 642-646.

Huq, M. (1988). The present state of English language teaching in Bangladesh. *BELTA Journal* 114: 1-4.

Ishihara, N. and Cohen, Andrew D. (2010). *Teaching and Learning Pragmatics: Where Language and Culture meet*. Great Britain: Longman.

Khan, S. S. (1995). *Village schools in Bangladesh: Caught between tradition and change*. Dhaka: Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh.

Kniffka, Hannes. (2001). *Indigenous Grammar Across Cultures*. Peter Lang Publishing.

Krashen, S.D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Great Britain: Pergamon Press.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod. (Routledge ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

Mitchell, R., & Myles, F. (2004). Second language learning theories (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.

Mirdehghan, M.et.al. (2011). Cultural Barriers: Pros and Cons on ELT in Iran. *International Journal of English Linguistics*. Vol. 1, No.1.

National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. (1996). Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century. Yonkers, NY: Author.

Penn, J. (1972). Linguistic relativity versus innate ideas. Paris: Mouton.

Punch, K. (2005). Introduction to Social Research Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches (2ndedition). London: Sage

Rahman, A. (1991). English within the national curriculum. *The Dhaka University Studies* Part A 48/1: 47-56.

Rahman, A. (1999).English Language Teacher Education in Bangladesh: towards an alternative Paradigm. PhD thesis submitted to Institute of Education, University of London.

Sapir, Edward. (1958). *Culture, language and Personality*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Siddique, R. (2004). Another assumed ideal from the West?.*Stamford journal of English*, 61(1), 1-7.

Sinha, B. S. (2001). English phobia in our schools and colleges. In Alam, F., Zamab, Niaz. & Ahmed, T. (Eds.), *Revisioning English in Bangladesh*. 169-164. Dhaka, Bangladesh: The University Press Limited.

Steiner, G. (1972). Whorf, Chomsky and the student of literature. *The Language of Literature Autumn*, 4(1), 15-34.

Tang, R. (1999).The place of "Culture" in the Foreign Language Classroom: A Reflection. *The Internet TESL Journal*. Vol. V, No 8.

Zhang, C. Ollila, L.O. & Harvey, C.B. (1998). Chinese Parents' Perception of their children's literacy and schooling in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Education,* 23(2), 182-190.