

Target Language Usage in ESL Classrooms: Perception of Teachers in Jaffna District

J. I. C. Thamari

Department of English Language Teaching, University of Jaffna
christtila.thamari@gmail.com

ESL classrooms in the Jaffna context are unique learning environments where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds learn English as a new language. In such classrooms, the use of the Target Language is a critical factor that influences intended learning outcomes. Based on Krashen's input hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition occurs through exposure to comprehensible input, this study aims at exploring the perceptions of language teachers with regard to the target language usage in classrooms while attempting to recognize the challenges faced and strategies implemented, by them to promote the same. Data were collected from 106 teachers of English whose first language is Tamil, attached to both government and private schools within the Jaffna district. To triangulate, multiple instruments including questionnaires, focus-group discussions, classroom observations, and identity portraits were utilized. A mixed methodology was employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that respondents perceived target language usage as mandatory in ESL classrooms. However, several challenges were identified by them in promoting target language usage, such as students' limited exposure to English, lack of interest, family background, varying competency levels of individual learners, and difficulty in adapting the target language to local context. Moreover, this study found that teachers' beliefs, experiences, proficiency level, and identities shaped their perceptions of target language usage in ESL classrooms. Teachers with more positive beliefs on the target language and its usage were more likely to prioritize the use of target language in their authentic classroom practices while rest of them hesitate to use it by putting blame on the students. Hence, the present study highlights the complex factors that influence ESL teachers' perceptions of target language usage and emphasizes the need for further research into the proficiency level and professional development of ESL teachers to promote effective target language use in ESL classrooms.

Keywords: Authentic, ESL Classroom, Exposure, Perception, Target Language