



## EXPERIMENTAL TEACHING USING BILINGUAL METHOD IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM IN MIZORAM

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### Abstract

The paper presents an experimental teaching on bilingual method in a private school in Mizoram. A total of thirty-eight students studying in 12<sup>th</sup> Standard took part and it took eighteen days to complete the research. The students were divided into two groups and an hour each was dedicated every working day for each of the group. Two tests were conducted during the research period. This study is a part of an ongoing research and further experiments and observations are needed. It is interesting to see the extent in which bilingual method of teaching English helps learners especially those in the school level develop their language skills with specific reference to speaking.

Keywords: bilingual method, mother tongue, L1, L2, language learning, second language, code switching.

### 1. Introduction

Education in Mizoram was first introduced by the British at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the arrival of the British in Mizoram, the spreading of education was initiated and entrusted to the missionaries. Elementary education was introduced in the state in the year 1894. Up until this point, Mizos were completely illiterate and had no written language of their own. However, prior to 1894, T. H. Lewin, District Commissioner (DC) of the Chittagong Hill Tracts had attempted to write the Lushai or Mizo language in his book "*Progressive Colloquial Exercise in Lushai Dialect*" which was published in 1874. The next major work was undertaken by two missionaries, F. W. Savidge and J. H. Lorrain who published a book entitled "*A Grammar and Dictionary of the Lushai Language*" in 1898 from Shillong. In many respects, it can be said that education in Mizoram started with the arrival of these two pioneer missionaries.

The spread of education picked up pace in Mizoram after India won independence from the British. One important change was that prior to independence, the Government efforts was mainly to increase primary education, but after independence a number of primary schools was upgraded to middle and high school level. The number of schools (Primary, Middle, High and Higher Secondary) has increased drastically in the past few decades especially as compared to the 20<sup>th</sup> century when there were just four schools.

The medium of instruction in a majority of the schools, except for a few (a majority of which is run by the state Government) where Mizo is used, is English. English, as a subject is introduced as early as pre-school or nursery and is also used as a medium to teach other subjects as well. At the college and university level, English is the only official medium of instruction in all institutions in Mizoram except for the study of other languages.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Traditionally, the English language at the school level makes no provision for any use of the mother tongue. The medium of instruction in a majority of the schools in Mizoram, except for a few (a majority of which is run by the state Government) where Mizo is used, is English. English, as a subject is introduced as early as pre-school or nursery and is also used as a medium to teach other subjects as well. At the college and university level, English is the only official medium of instruction in all institutions in Mizoram except for the study of other languages. However many teachers are finding the learners mother tongue as a very useful tool to help the learners while it also helps the weaker learners to understand better.

The objective of this study is to compare under experimental conditions the effectiveness of the Bilingual Method and the Direct Method in teaching English to Mizo-speaking pupils in the realistic setting of the classroom. The class chosen was 12th Standard and a questionnaire was distributed among 38 students studying in K.T Higher Secondary School, Lunglei, Mizoram.

The class was divided into Experimental and Control Groups. The two groups were divided on no particular basis and have mixed abilities. The two groups were taught from a prescribed syllabus of 12th standard. "The Third Level" written by Jack Finney was taught. By means of 'The Third Level', Jack Finney shows the human tendency to escape into the world that doesn't exist because the real life is too hard to handle. Charley is convinced there are three, not just two, levels at Grand Central Station. Charley's psychiatrist, and his friends, thinks his delusion is a waking-dream wish fulfilment, and like his stamp collection, a temporary refuge from a world full of insecurity, fear, war and worry. It was quite a fascinating story.

The story third level clearly explores the science fiction genre of 'time travel'; Jack Finney, the recipient of the world fantasy award interweaves fantasy with the reality in the most futuristic projection of time travel. Charley wishes to be transported to the third level, the world of 1894 which is supposedly much happier and quieter

place to be. It is one of the most concise and entertaining story about time travel. The question whether the third level exist in real or only in charley's mind can be inferred from Sam's letter.

The story also dwells on the theme of escapism, not only as a psychological refuge from the grim realities of the present day world but also as a desire to stay with the past or to keep the past alive in the complexities of the present. In the story charley not only expresses desire to escape but also prepares and tries very hard, a desire which is not contested by the wife either. Sam has also happily escaped with no plans to resort to his old profession along with scores of other people who cross the grand central everyday... to escape seems to be an all pervasive feeling

Eighteen days were taken to complete the experimental teaching. An hour each was dedicated everyday for the two groups. One test was given after completing the particular task and another test was given again later.

The experimental group was taught through bilingual method. The Controlled group was taught the same through the Direct method. In the experimental group the mother tongue was used to explain difficult words and sentences. In the Control group, no mother tongue was used. The mother tongue equivalent was given for words which are unfamiliar to the students such as psychiatrist, refuge, gabardine, avenue, flickering, spittoons, lapel, premium and so on. Since there are no trains and train stations in Mizoram, there were many things about the stations to be explained, such as ticket windows, information booth and railroads. All these things were given the mother tongue equivalent for the Experimental group while pictures and drawings were very much necessary to explain the meanings for the Control group.

**2.1 Background of Students who had English/Mizo medium of instruction**

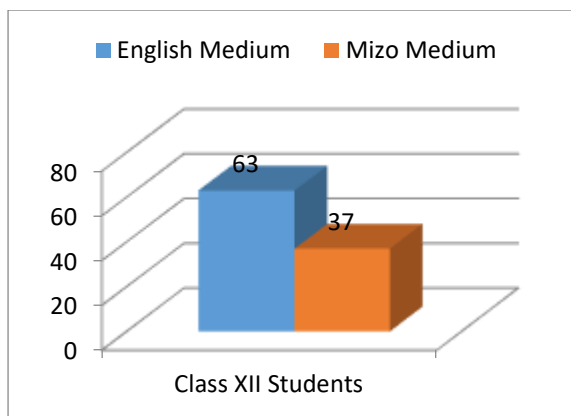


Figure 1

The questionnaire was administered and the result shows that 63% of the students have studied in an English medium school for more than 10 years while 37% of the students have studied in a Mizo medium school and they have been struggling more in the English class room. 27% of the students are using a bilingual dictionary for difficult words while 18% of the students are using both a monolingual as well as a bilingual dictionary. Only 11% of the students are not using a bilingual dictionary. All of the students have found it interesting when the teacher uses the mother tongue in the classroom. The sense of understanding and spark the mother tongue has created when the teachers use L1 was fascinating. Many of the students told the researcher that the use of the learners' mother tongue is especially helpful when it comes to learning grammar and understanding the technique of writing skills.

**2.2 Students' opinion on use of L1 in the classroom**

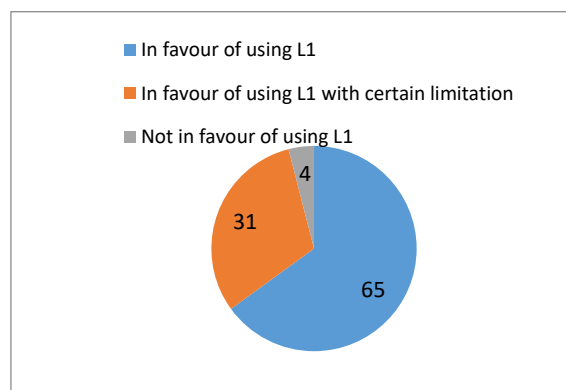


Figure 2

Only 31% of the students want the teacher to often use the mother tongue in the classroom while 65% of the students believe the teacher must use the mother tongue not very frequently. The rest of the students do not believe in the use of the mother tongue by the teacher. 11% of the students do not think that the use of the mother tongue by the teacher in the class room has helped them learn English while the rest of the students agree that the use of the mother tongue in the class room by the teacher has absolutely helped them learn English better.

The students of the experimental group had more time to revise and practice in English since a lot of time was saved by the use of the mother tongue and the students were able to understand the items taught faster and were able to respond immediately. In the control group a lot of time was required for creating the situations and to explain the structures. For example, in "The Third Level", a lot of time was required to explain what the third level was, as well as the first and second level, since most of the students have neither seen a train nor a train station in real life. Pictures and drawings on the blackboard were necessary to explain all these things to them. Since many of them have not send a letter or been to the post office, maybe because of the advance in technology most students use social networking sites like facebook, twitter and so on, a first day cover had to be explained in detail. It took a much lesser time for the Experimental Group as it could be easily explained in the mother tongue, but it required a lot of time for the Control Group to understand the meaning of a first day cover.

**3. Results of the tests**

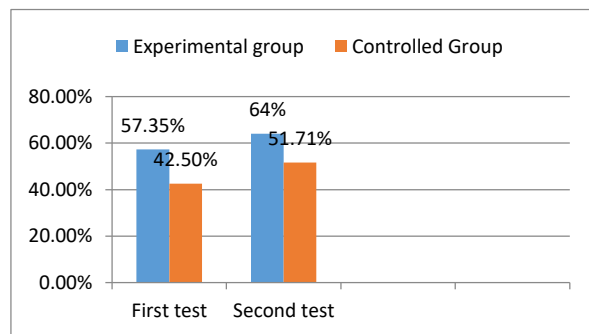


Figure 3

A test was conducted after the teacher had completed the task. The average percentage mark in the Experimental Group was 56.25% and in the Control Group it was 42.5%. Three students of the Experimental Group were able to score more than 70. After the first test, the students in the Control Group were taught using the bilingual method and another test was conducted. This time the average percentage mark in the Experimental Group was 64% and the Control group was 51.71%.

The result shows that even the weaker learners were able to understand when the mother tongue equivalent is given. We must know that there are students with high calibre in the Control Group and they have done well even when the teacher used the Direct Method. But after the teacher uses the Bilingual Method, each and everyone from the Control Group has improved as the test result shows. There is no harm in using the mother tongue inputs in English classes and in fact it saves time and helps the learners to have clear understanding.

It is now important to look at some particular characteristics of the Mizo society that needs to be addressed for the teaching to be more effective. The first issue that needs to be looked at is that of language. Since the whole state of Mizoram speaks a common language i.e. Mizo, other languages are not much used in the state. Even in English medium schools, it has been observed that teachers tend to use Mizo at times even more frequently than English. Communication between the local students, even in the classroom tends to be in Mizo most of the time. There should be enough opportunities for the students to develop their English proficiency in the classroom.

Secondly, the students in Mizoram tend to have a lot of respect, sometimes even awe for their teachers. Because of this, they are not very responsive in class and do not get involved in many of the activities in the classroom. It is important for the teachers to actively involve the students and not just deliver a lecture, especially in an English class where the use of the language is necessary for developing language proficiency.

Lastly, literary appreciation has always been the main focus on the English classroom in Mizoram. Even though the Mizoram Board of School Education syllabus has stated that English must be taught as a language for communication, this is sadly not the case in many of the schools. This problem needs to be dealt with tactfully as literary appreciation is still one of the objectives stated in the MBSE English syllabus. The teachers must learn ways to improvise so that they are still able to teach the language as a means for communication while at the same time not ignoring teaching literary appreciation.

#### 4. Conclusion

Bilingual method provides ample time for practice because the time usually taken up in a direct method class for presenting some material is cut short to the minimum by the introduction of the mother tongue. Bilingual method leaves enough scope for the growth of the child's imaginative and creative aptitudes by not spoon feeding the child with everything. A systematic utilization of the mother tongue is expected to achieve all these in Bilingual Method.

Mother tongue is not considered as interfering with the learning process in second language. The belief is that the teacher can banish the native language from the classroom but cannot be banished from the students' mind. The mother tongue is used to gloss difficult words but not for translating the whole language.

The teacher chooses the closest natural equivalent which conveys the precise communicative value of the utterance. The mother tongue proves to be the ideal means of getting the meaning across as completely and as quickly as possible. Dodson was able to show, by controlled experiments that a combination of printed word, mother tongue and picture strip (for retention of meaning) can bring a class more quickly to a point where they can act out a basic situation freely and naturally as is possible.

The bilingual method seems to assume that second language can be learned with the help of the already acquired language - mother tongue -

provided it is not used as translation but as a means to achieve the communicative end. The mother tongue equivalents are given to prevent students from giving empty responses. Once the students have developed a sufficient command of the target language, mother tongue is completely withdrawn and the exercise becomes monolingual.

In general, one can conclude that the English teachers are positive about the use of Bilingual education in the classroom, at least in the initial stages. Even though most of the teachers are bilingual in the classroom, the report shows that they use mostly English in their lessons. Their use of the students' mother tongue shows positive impact on the students especially for their understanding. The students also see the benefit of this and most of them prefer their teachers to use their mother tongue in the classroom, particularly when they do not understand the difficult words and sentences in English. While encouraging the use of English in the classroom, the report encourages the teachers to use the students' mother tongue judiciously to support student learning. The result suggests a need for further support for teachers in understanding how and when to use the target language and mother tongue in the classroom lessons. Nevertheless the question remained whether the Bilingual Method could retain its superiority over the Direct Method if the experiment were carried in classroom conditions which are typical and representative, perhaps under less favourable conditions. Moreover, Bilingual Method had to be given a full and fair trial by means of repeated experiments before it could win universal acceptance.

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