

Role of Mother Tongue in ESL Classroom: Perception of ESL Teachers in Jaffna

JI Christtila Thamari

University of Jaffna

<thamari@univ.jfn.ac.lk>

Abstract - Jaffna is a mono-lingual location, where the dominant language remains as Tamil. English language is not used in authentic social context. Hence it is confined only to classroom and Tamil language remains the only source for communication among Tamilians. None received exposure to English outside classrooms during the last three decades because of strict administration of 'Pure-Tamil-Only' act in Northern and Eastern part of the country by the LTTE Nationalistic movement. The ESL teachers, who were born and bred during this period in Jaffna, had different perceptions towards English language and ESL pedagogy. This research sheds light on teachers' perception of mother tongue usage in ESL classrooms within Jaffna context. This study is limited to secondary classes of government-aided, national and private colleges. It mainly examines and analyzes the perception of ESL teachers towards usage of Tamil in ESL classrooms, where language of instruction is also Tamil. In order to achieve this objective, both quantitative and qualitative analytical methodology, which contains questionnaires, semi-structured focus-group interviews and identity portraits was undertaken. Data were collected randomly among Jaffna peninsula ESL teachers, who possess range of exposure to target language, qualifications and experiences in ESL teaching and with various socio-economic background. The findings made thereby show that, ESL teachers' English proficiency level determines their attitude as well as perception towards the use of mother tongue in ESL classroom. Thus, study recommends the policy-makers and teacher-educators, to upgrade the proficiency level of ESL teachers in Jaffna is vital.

Keywords: Mono-lingual location, Target language, ESL pedagogy.