

## Language Simulation Process & Implications: A Case Study on EFL Business Communication Class.

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*Abstract: The paper discusses the language simulation features and its implications through a case study of an undergraduate business communication class. It analyzes a set of qualitative data feedback collected from a group of students who participated in the simulation for four classes and shows how simulation helps them to effectively overcome language affective factors and acquire business communication language successfully. It also presents a checklist and recommendations for effective language simulation in EFL classrooms in Bangladesh.*

**Key words:** Language simulation, language acquisition, fluency, adult learners, & affective filter.

### 1. Introduction

English language teaching pedagogy suggests for language acquisition instead of language learning for the adults. There have been many attempts, tools, methods and techniques to apply various language acquisition models in the English language classrooms. One of the least explored language acquisition models for Bangladeshi English language classrooms is the model of simulation. Most teachers are familiar only with language role-plays or games in an English class as extraordinary language acquisition activity. However, there is a growing interest for language simulation among the local ELT practitioners which is why we need to understand and apply effective language simulation process.

#### 1.1 What is language simulation?

A simulation can be defined as an activity that stems from a problem experienced in the real world outside the language class and connects with it. In a business classroom simulation, students are given a language task to solve which is related to business communication. The learners respond to a specific language task and act within the constraints (set by the simulation) of the environment to complete it.

Both role-plays and language simulations are interactive and extensive in language use. However, role plays expose language use only whereas simulations provide a realistic setting for more extensive interaction in which students can get more personally involved.

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### 1.2 Why language simulations in language teaching?

Ken Hyland in his article *Language-Learning Simulations: A Practical Guide* (1993) discussed motivation, fluency development, skills integration, active participation and reduced anxiety as outcomes of language simulation.

- a. Motivation: Language simulations motivate students to use the language since it comes up with excitements. Communication becomes purposeful rather than artificial. Another reason for motivation is that participants can identify themselves with the roles that they want to play in future as an executive or a manager in public private corporate offices. Besides, they also feel excited since simulations give them chances to take their own decisions.[1]
- b. Fluency development: Students learn by doing.[2] Simulation leads to fluency since simulated tasks require the need for communicating the message appropriately. Communication rather than grammatical accuracy is important.
- c. Integration of skills:[3] Language simulation applies "whole task practice", a critical feature of a communicative language teaching, to apply students' realistic situations, spoken as well as written tasks including analyzing information, and making appropriate choices.
- d. Active participation: Simulated tasks engage students for active participation[4] highlighting that language input is very high in the simulation. This input later helps to occur an essential requirement for language acquisition.[5]
- e. Reduced anxiety: A language simulation reduces the stress associated with learning and using new language.[6] Due to breaking out of the classroom scenario, "safe environment" for making mistakes. There is no error correction opportunity either. Moreover, there is less stress involved in playing the role of someone else.

Finally, simulations motivate learners' interaction, active participation in an anxiety free environment to use the language freely and most extensively in a language classroom.

## 2. Research background

The area of the research is adult learners', specifically university students' English language acquisition process through classroom instruction in an EFL setting like Bangladesh. Bangladesh is an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) country. Due to EFL features of language use in the society, the exposure to English language use of the adult learners is quite minimum which leads to minimum language acquisition for the adults. Besides, for several factors like fear, anxiety and lack of motivation, adult learners in Bangladesh are unable to acquire English language through traditional classroom instructions. Currently, various language teaching approaches such as task based approach, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are in practice for classroom instruction. This study discusses the process of simulation and its implication in language acquisition for the adult learners in Bangladesh.

### 2.1 Statement of the Research Problem

The research problem is that adult learners especially the university students are unable to acquire business English through classroom instructions. They are showing competence in English grammar, academic essay writing, informal inside and outside classroom discussion and talks in English but they are unable to perform business communication tasks such as Email communications, presentations and business report making fluently and accurately.

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### **2.2 Justification**

The lack of English language competence of the educated young adults has been a concern in the academia and in the employment sector for quite a long time. There are many graduates in the country who lack proper communication skills in speaking and writing which slow down their progress in their academic studies as well as the growth in the professional career. So, an innovative model for English language acquisition for the adult learners is immensely felt at present. This study discusses the process, and implications of language simulation activity in English language classroom for adult learners in Bangladesh.

### **2.3 Gap in the existing literature**

The existing literature of language simulation discussion is not common. The interviews with the ELT practitioners reveal that many ELT practitioners have heard of the term language simulation but never attempted to apply it in their language class.

### **2.4 Audience of the Study:**

The audience of the study will be the English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals who teach in the public and private schools, colleges and universities of Bangladesh. The study will also help the academicians, curriculum developers and ministry of education to understand the language simulation dynamics.

### **3. Aim of the study**

The aim of the study is to prove the hypothesis that students at the undergraduate classes can acquire business English through language simulation model.

### **3.1 Research questions**

The research aims to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does the language simulation help learners overcome language learning fear, lack of motivation and high anxiety?
- To what extent does the simulation help learners acquire business English?
- What are the considerations implementing language simulation in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms?

### **4. Methodology**

The research follows mostly a qualitative approach. It includes a survey and an observation to identify the extent to which the report writing simulation for a business communication course helps language acquisition and increases participation, language use confidence and overall language learning.

A business communication class was selected for the experiment in which a language simulation for report writing has been implemented. The experimental class students participated in a survey on their language experiences during language simulation. Besides, the same class was also observed following a classroom observation checklist. Finally, The observation findings and survey on students were compared to understand the effects of simulation process.

#### **4.1 Research Design**

The research includes a four consecutive classes of report writing simulation in a business communication class of undergraduate students of American International University Bangladesh (AIUB). This experimental class includes students of engineering and computer science who took Business communication as their English credit course. The class included both male and female students.

#### **4.2 Students' survey**

A students' survey was done at the end of the simulation to identify the extent to which the learners were able to overcome the language fears, anxiety and lack of motivation for language acquisition and acquired the business English in specific business English contexts as in Email writing, presentations and business report making.

#### **4.3 Class observation**

The experimental business communication simulation class was observed for three weeks to identify how students dealt with simulation tasks, how these tasks helped them adjust with language fear, confidence and perform. Besides, their language use has also been observed.

There were some limitations of class observations. There was no video or audio record system of the class observation. There was no external class observer either. So, the researcher himself observed the experimental class for which some important details of the class might have been lost. Perhaps, more insightful and details observations would be generated if any external observer or any neutral observer was present in the simulation class.

#### **4.4 Participants of the study**

The participants of the study were a group of 40 students in a business communication course of four months at American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB). The class was selected randomly. However, there were some common features of the participants. All of them completed 12 years of formal education in Bangla medium education and are now studying honors B. Sc. in Computer science or Electrical and Electronics Engineering. Their language competence level was similar in the sense that they belong to intermediate level in four skills. They were initially shy to speak in English. They do not use English outside their language classrooms.

#### **5. A Simulation Case Study**

Based on Jones' (1982: 4-6) language simulation model ( i.e. simulated environment, structure based on explicit facts, and a reality of functions), the experimental business simulation for report writing was designed. Let's discuss it in details.

Firstly, an engaging simulation work environment was established. Students were given imaginary status of office staff member of a research firm which produces business reports as clients' demands. All the students were given a formal dress code to maintain for the simulation class period. They were asked to treat each other only as colleagues working in a research firm.

Secondly, the end product of simulation was fixed. At the end of a simulation, the

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students would produce a business report in teams and would give presentations on their work. Both report and presentation were to be assessed for the course grade.

Thirdly, there were several thumb rules fixed for the students to maintain during the simulation. They were:

- Use English only for communication
- Use only emails to communicate, share the report work
- Use formality in communication during simulation time

For all three points mentioned above, it seemed that the students remained time disciplined, and highly motivated.

#### **5.1 Report Writing Phase**

The report writing simulation was completed in four classes in two weeks. Each class completed several phases of the report.

In the first class, the simulation report writing topic was revealed. The topic was to prepare a business report on AIUB students' mobile phone use habits. The students were divided in various groups. They got introduced to each other in groups. The group members and the team leader were selected for each group. They exchanged information from each other. After that a standard business report's major parts were discussed in the class with samples. At the end of the class, the simulation norms (the language use rules, communication rules, important datelines, dress code etc.) were informed in the class.

In the second class, the procedure of how to prepare a survey question was discussed in the class. A sample survey question was shown in the class. Following that, the groups prepared the survey questions in groups for their report. Each group prepared the survey questions in which all group members contributed. After the class, the groups sent the questionnaires to the teacher for feedback. The teacher replied to each group's work with feedback as necessary. The groups which faced problems to prepare survey questions personally met the teacher outside the class time during teacher's consultation hour.

In the third class, the groups brought survey data to the class, analyzed them and prepared survey results.

In the fourth class, the students presented their work in reports as a group work and gave power points presentations individually.

#### **5.2 Simulation Features**

There were several distinctive simulation features that were evident in the experimental simulation class:

##### **5.2.1. Students' role change**

In the experimental simulation class, students treated each other as office colleagues. So, they frequently used a number of business conversation routines (which they otherwise do not use), used formal language and used only English in the class, wrote emails within and beyond the groups under the capacity of official roles etc. This significantly increased their language use.

### **5.2.2. Simulation Assessment**

It is important that students become aware of their assessment process. Both integrative and instrumental motivation were connected to the simulation assessment. Once the students get to know how their work will be assessed, they remain connected to the simulation till the end.

Besides, careful topic selection to keep students engaged in long time, and pragmatic context are also an important features of language simulation.

### **6. The Simulation Class Observation**

Fundamentally, the class observation model is based on ELT expert David Nunan's class observation model (1989). Four classes were observed.

#### **6.1 Use of language**

Students strictly maintained English as their language of communication in the simulation classes. They asked questions, replied, exchanged information in English. If one member in the team switches to native language, the others remind to continue in English.

#### **6.2. Use of Emails as communication tools**

During the simulation, students wrote a number of emails within and outside the groups to exchange information, and for peer review work. They sent and received emails from the course teacher, the simulation moderator too. This gave them a chance to apply the business English writing in many practical contexts other than quiz or exam writing for the course.

#### **6.3 Professional etiquettes**

Students showed high level of professional etiquettes in the simulation class in greetings, permissions, apology etc. They also showed professional non verbal clues.

#### **6.4. Classroom Management**

The classroom management became very easy since students took the roles to control it. They were literally the governing body of the class. They worked in the class to complete their designated report writing tasks and submitted each task in time. They were highly motivated to complete their work since they were given an official role.

Overall, the report writing simulation generated a resourceful business language use opportunity for the simulation participants.

### **7. Survey**

The experimental simulation participants responded to a set of survey questions to deliver their experiences about the simulation. The survey questions were both close and open ended. However, the number of close ended questions was only few.

The major survey questions were the following:

- The extent of difficulty of simulation tasks (language tasks, working in groups, sending mail and replying mail for tasks, putting on formal dress in four consecutive classes etc).

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- The route of motivation from beginning to the end of the report writing simulation.
- The business communication language learning and the report writing understanding.
- The class participation.
- The route of confidence during the simulation.
- The communicative English use.

**Let's discuss the survey results**

The experimental simulation seemed enjoyable to the students. However, 80 percent found it easy and enjoyable while 20 percent found it challenging but effective as well as enjoyable. No one found it ineffective.

The same kind of reflection is also evident in the question for route of motivation for the simulation participants. Some participants (20 percent) found it downward motivating which means they were initially motivated but as the simulation grew, they found it hard and lost concentration. However, 80 percent of students found the simulation process upward motivating.

For the business English learning question, the same 80 percent found that they learnt much more or as much as they wanted to learn during the simulation while 20 percent thought they didn't learn as much as they wanted.

For the simulation task participation, 100 percent participation was ensured. 40 percent said that they participated very highly while 60 percent said they participated more than they thought of.

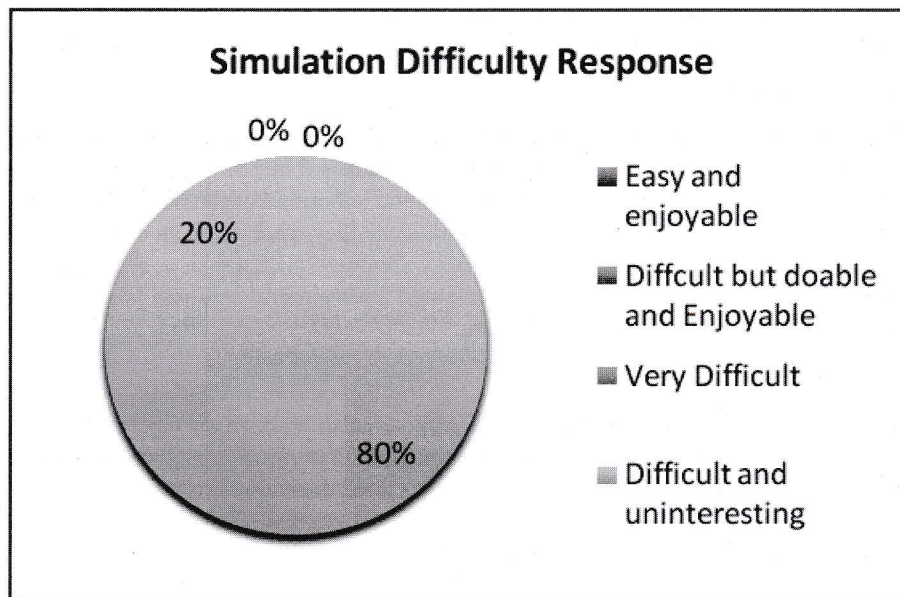


Chart 1: Simulation difficulty response

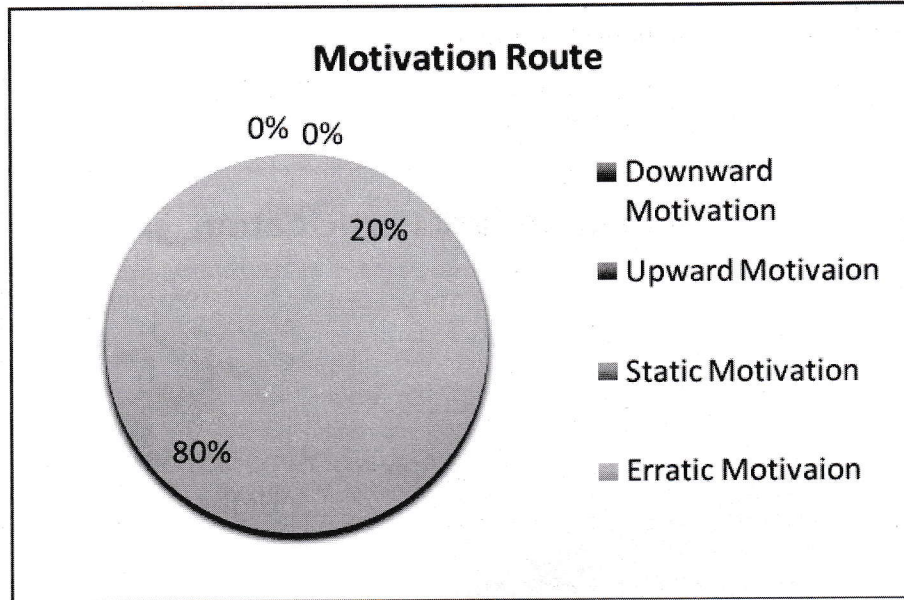


Chart 2: Simulation motivation route

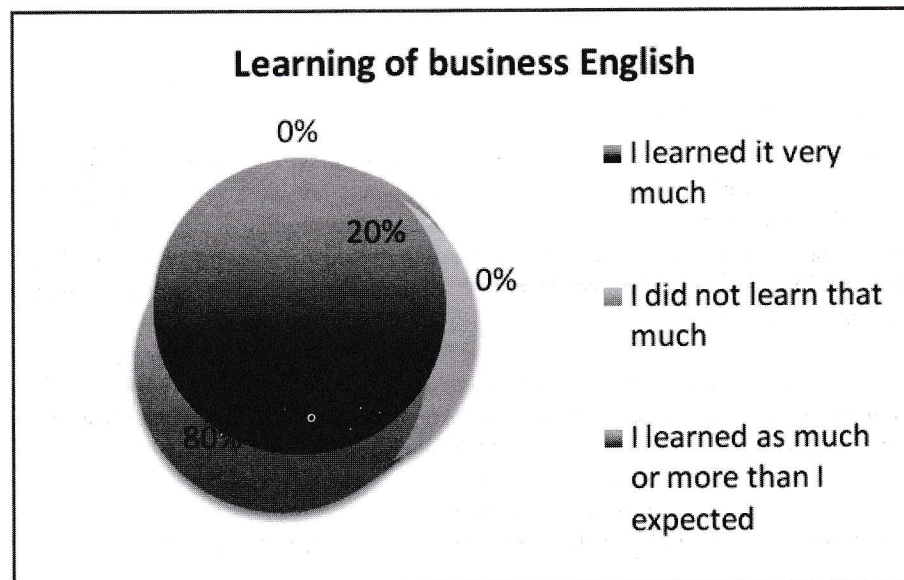


Chart 3: Learning of business English



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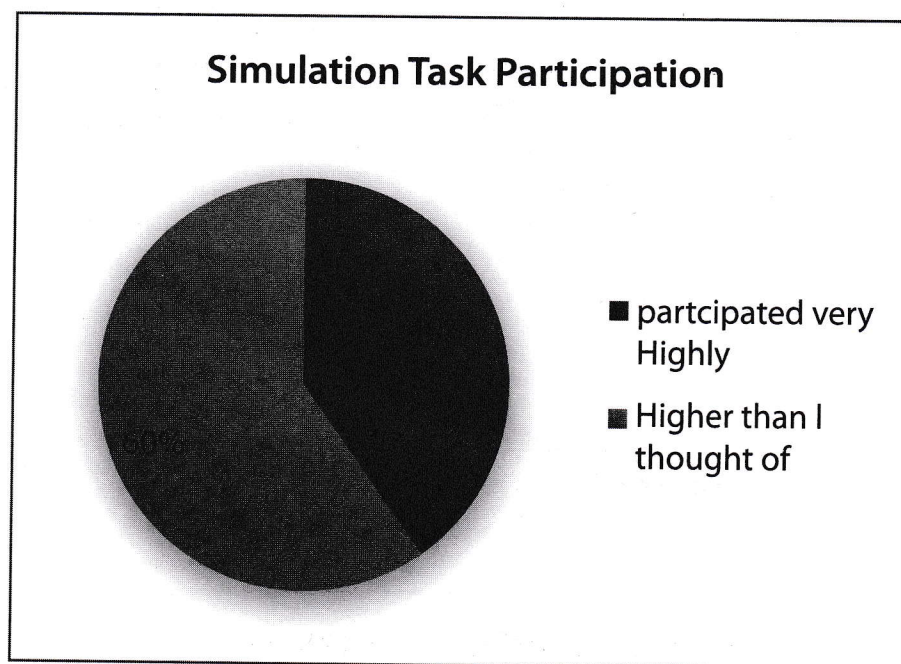


Chart 4: Simulation task participation

First, the local English language classrooms are generally not well equipped with standard IT facilities. The audio-visual materials may not work properly in the right time. The teacher must make sure the uninterrupted technical support to run the simulation smoothly and effectively. Otherwise, once the students find simulation work difficult for lack of proper technical support, they will give up and eventually language acquisition will fail.

Second, audio-visual material sometimes causes some extra pressures such as shyness, and fear of failing in the course. So, a language teacher must carefully devise proper plans to use technology in a language classroom.

Third, the IT tools requirements such as carrying laptop or internet enabled smart phone in the class should be fixed with prior discussion with the students.

Fourth, too large a length or too short a length may cause troubles.

Fifth, the grouping of the students should be made in such a way that all groups are well balanced in terms of group competence.

Sixth, the students should be well informed about the simulation do's and don'ts, and should be regularly reminded.

### **Conclusion**

English language simulation is a new concept in the ELT landscape of Bangladesh. In order to get the maximum benefit out of it, English teachers should practice them frequently and the experiences should be shared extensively.

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