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## CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | EDITORIAL

# First and second language use in Asian EFL: A book review

Javan Walker III<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** This book directly addresses the issue of L1 usage in the L2 English classroom. The intended audience for the book includes teacher trainers, local English teachers in Southeast Asia, and Western English-language teachers looking to work abroad. However, the book could also be useful to administrators of English acquisition programs in Asian universities and policy makers in Southeast Asia tasked with creating pedagogical standards for English-language instruction at the university level.

**Subjects:** Teaching & Learning - Education; Bilingualism/ESL; Teachers & Teacher Education; Teaching & Learning

**Keywords:** EFL; Asia; English; language; instruction; curriculum

This book (Forman, 2016) directly addresses the issue of L1 usage in the L2 English classroom. The common theme of the book is that current L1 approaches in Asian ESL/EFL pedagogy are fundamentally unsound for a number of documented reasons which the author demonstrates largely through his own research in Thailand, although he does provide other similar research as a buttress. The intended audience for the book includes teacher trainers, local English teachers in Southeast Asia, and Western English-language teachers looking to work abroad. However, the book could also be useful to administrators of English acquisition programs in Asian universities and policy makers in Southeast Asia tasked with creating pedagogical standards for English language instruction at the university level.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Javan Walker III is a professor of English and a PhD student in English Education. His research concerns pedagogy and curriculum with regard to the acquisition of English as a second or foreign language. His review of Ross Forman's book should encourage those in the field of English acquisition to read the book and consider the impact of Forman's findings upon current pedagogy.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

English is currently considered the business language of choice around the world, leading many non-English-speaking nations to incorporate the teaching of English into their curriculums. This has led to a continuous debate on how English should be taught, and what methods are most appropriate. One such issue in this debate is whether or not an instructor should use the learners' native language while teaching English. In many non-English-speaking nations, including those of Southeast Asia, the answer is no. Professor Ross Forman examines the issue from the perspectives of both his long experience in Thailand and by way of existing research on the subject, and argues persuasively that students learning English are better served when their native language is used in the English teaching classroom. He demonstrates that doing so has benefits which are educational, social, and cultural. Anyone concerned with how English is acquired should read this book.

The book is divided into four parts, each part corresponding to an overall theme that the author has observed or believes to be demonstrated from relevant research. In Part 1, the author gives a brief autobiographical review of his work in Thailand and Australia (Chapter 1), a short but compelling presentation of the theory which supports his work (Chapter 2), and a summation of the research he has conducted over his career (Chapter 3). Chapter 2 is the strongest chapter in this section, in that it begins to build his case that the theories and research he presents are all known and respected, but not yet widely implemented into Southeast Asian English classrooms.

In Part 2, the author lays out the case for how bilingual teacher talk works (Chapter 4), and the necessity of considering the intercultural and intertextual dimensions that are necessarily present in English-language classrooms (Chapter 5). Then, building upon ideas he presented in Part 1, the author makes crucial arguments for L1 usage and bilingualism in L2 instruction, culminating in ten principles for L1 use in language classrooms (Chapter 6).

In Part 3, the author problematizes the idea of learner identity with regard to L2 usage; in particular, he considers alterity—the idea of “othering” and “being othered”—and that research has thus far not explored the problems of how one engages with another language and how that must therefore affect the self (Chapter 7). He also looks at language play relative to the individual through a case study he conducted on the subject (Chapter 8). He then considers views of L1 and L2 performance (Chapter 9), demonstrating how the self is affected when moving from the L2 to the L1 and vice versa.

In Part 4, the author makes his broadest and boldest claims with regard to English acquisition. In Chapter 10, he speaks to the failure of global EFL textbooks to properly serve their unique learners. In Chapter 11, he broaches the domains of EFL and ESL and explores these ideas from the learner’s perspective. This chapter highlights the fact that the learner’s situation is not considered, that EFL and ESL are nothing alike because of the external situations which define each, and that these facts must be taken into consideration by teachers of English or learning will be hindered. Finally, in Chapter 12, the author concludes with where he believes this discussion of the various aspects of L1 usage in the L2 classroom should lead and how further research in these areas will be productive.

This book provides perhaps the strongest indictment to date of current pedagogy with regard to L1 usage in the L2 classroom. The author makes the critical argument that the way current professionals think about and publish on this subject needs to be reformed in that we conform to research on aspects of language acquisition which have largely been left out of the discussion, e.g. either Cook’s (1997) work on monolingual bias in second language research, or Kachru’s (1997) research regarding world Englishes. If there is a weakness in the book, it is that the entirety of the case studies and the bulk of the research presented come from the author’s own publications relative to his experiences in Thailand. The depth to which he presents evidence from his case studies may be a hindrance to some readers, even if they are defensible from the standpoint of supporting his argument through research. Although Forman rightly points out the fact that his case studies are too small for one to make generalizations, he also shows that this research appears to be theoretically compatible with ideas long extant in the field which have heretofore not been applied in the broader context. Hopefully, this book will inspire similar scholastic efforts from other professionals in other nations because this is the most cogent material presented on the subject thus far.

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