



The Effects of Using the Mother Tongue When Teaching English Language

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تأثير استعمال اللغة الام على تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية

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Abstract:

There has long been debate concerning using L1 in L2 lessons. According to Krashen (1981), extensive exposure to L2 is necessary for L2 learning to be successful. Furthermore, he claims that having access to L1 is what leads to failure in L2 exposure. In contrast to Krashen's theory, several academics stated that using L1 in L2 classrooms proves to be beneficial to learners. This research aimed to find out the effect of using first language (L1) when teaching English language. The data were obtained from questionnaires distributed to 60 teachers. The other research sample consists of 8 male and female teachers from 6 secondary public schools in Libya. The different schools in this study were chosen randomly using stratified random sampling. Those 8 teachers were interviewed to discover their perceptions towards the effects of applying L1 in L2 classes. The study addressed various issues that may influence teachers' practices, including teachers' perceptions towards the processes of using L1 inside English classes. The results of the questionnaire revealed that 75% of the teachers stated that L1 should be used when explaining difficult concepts. In addition, the results of the interviews revealed that six out of eight teachers were quite sure that using L1 helps students to feel more secure and confident to use the target language.

Keywords: Mother tongue. English language, role of the teacher, code-switching, methods of teaching.

المخلص

لطالما ساد جدل طويل الأمد بشأن استخدام اللغة الأولى (L1) في دروس اللغة الثانية (L2). فوفقاً لـ Krashen (1981)، يعد التعرض المكثف للغة الثانية أمراً ضرورياً لنجاح عملية تعلمها. علاوة على ذلك، يزعم كراشن أن اللجوء إلى اللغة الأولى هو ما يؤدي إلى فشل التعرض للغة المستهدفة. وفي المقابل، يرى العديد من الأكاديميين أن استخدام اللغة الأولى في فصول اللغة الثانية يثبت فائدته للمتعلمين. هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء أثر استخدام اللغة الأولى (L1) عند تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. جُمعت البيانات من

خلال استبيانات وزعت على 60 معلماً ومعلمة. كما تضمنت عينة البحث الأخرى 8 معلمين ومعلمات من 6 مدارس ثانوية حكومية في ليبيا، حيث اختيرت هذه المدارس عشوائياً باستخدام أسلوب المعاينة العشوائية التطبيقية. أجريت مقابلات مع هؤلاء المعلمين الثمانية لاستكشاف تصوراتهم حول آثار تطبيق اللغة الأولى في فصول اللغة الثانية. تناولت الدراسة قضايا متنوعة قد تؤثر على ممارسات المعلمين، بما في ذلك تصوراتهم تجاه آليات استخدام اللغة الأولى داخل فصول اللغة الإنجليزية. أظهرت نتائج الاستبيان أن 75% من المعلمين أكدوا ضرورة استخدام اللغة الأولى عند شرح المفاهيم الصعبة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، كشفت نتائج المقابلات أن ستة من أصل ثمانية معلمين كانوا على يقين تام بأن استخدام اللغة الأولى يساعد الطلاب على الشعور بمزيد من الأمان والثقة في استخدام اللغة المستهدفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الأم، اللغة الإنجليزية، دور المعلم، التبديل اللغوي (Code-switching)، طرق التدريس.

1. Introduction

Using L1 in the classroom, according to some English teachers, promotes the growth of target language learning processes. They contend that all educators ought to give their students a secure environment in which they can express themselves using their mother tongue (Simensen, 1998). However, some other instructors think that excessive use of L1 could make learning a second language more challenging. It has long been controversial to teach English using a student's mother tongue. The optimum usage of the L1 has been advocated on the basis that it offers a secure environment where learners' lived experiences are recognized and where students may increase the socio-cognitive negotiation of educational roles (Brown, 2007). Additionally, using the L1 supports cognitive development, allowing learners to be able to interact with others who speak the same language without feeling ashamed or nervous.

On the other hand, the idea that English should be the only language used in English classes, has long been emphasised. According to Ellis (1996), students may find it more challenging to acquire the L2 if they are deprived of valuable L2 input. That is to say when learners don't have many opportunities to engage with the FL inside and outside of the classroom, they become unable to practice speaking the language and encounter difficulties when they are required to communicate using English language.

Though using L1 when teaching L2 can be beneficial, yet the overuse of students' mother tongue can hinder them from speaking English language. Thus this article investigates the effects of using students' L1 when teaching and learning English language.

2. Statement of the Problem

This study was mainly aimed at obtaining a description of the effects of using first language when teaching English language in Libyan secondary schools. The impact of the L1 processes used in L2 in Libyan secondary schools has been unknown and remains undeveloped.

In this context, using L1 process becomes important since it can benefit or hinder students' learning.

Investigating the influence of utilizing L1 is given a considerable concern in this study because of the undeniable role of the first language when teaching and learning L2. Thus, the following research questions are addressed to find out teachers' point of view towards this phenomena and how its perceived as an important concern for all learners.

3. Research Questions

1. What are teachers' perspectives towards using L1 in L2 classes?
2. What is the impact of using L1 when teaching English language?

4. Significance of the Study

This study aims to provide the information needed to enhance teaching methods and learning settings. This study is also important because it offers insights and recommendations for employing more effective and flexible teaching strategies that enable students to acquire the English language. Moreover, it constitutes an important reference for future teachers, educators, curriculum developers, and researchers interested in language teaching methodologies.

Hence, this study contributes to knowledge of using L1 in L2 classes by investigating Libyan secondary school teachers' perspectives towards the effects of using L1 when teaching and learning English language. This study intends to provide the information needed to enhance teaching and learning practices and improve learning conditions.

5. Literature review

5.1. Code-switching

As English, is rarely used for interpersonal communication in Libyan context, even though learners have unrestricted access to English-language resources on the Internet. The frequent use of L1 in English classrooms by both teachers and students is therefore typically done with the intention of minimizing any potential issues that may arise during the teaching-learning interaction, particularly in communication. One of the explanations is that teachers might save time while explaining and providing directions in EFL classes by using L1. Instead, the time might be used for language practice instead of English-language explanations and directions, which could cause students to not grasp them (Alfourganee, 2018). This is especially true for students who are not as proficient in English. Students may become demotivated if teachers insist on using the target language even when they still find it difficult to express themselves in English along with feeling that the favorable learning environment is threatened by this circumstance.

Although using L2 in the classroom has several advantages, Cook (2001) contends that L1 is important to apply when addressing problems because it will greatly help students complete the tasks effectively. Teachers most frequently use code-switching for a variety of reasons, including assessing their students' comprehension of the activity's goals and clarifying abstract ideas that may be challenging for them to grasp. In order to continue communicating, students also attempt to employ the native equivalent of a particular lexical item in the target language by code switching to their mother tongue. Further, according to Harmer (2001), students may code-switch to their mother language during cooperative exercises and group work, possibly because they believe they have not fully expressed themselves in the target language.

It can be concluded that according to some linguists, code switching is unavoidable when teaching and studying a second language and it can be an effective strategy for communication as it aids in more accurate meaning expression. Others think that instead of improving communication between people, using L1 extensively can hinder students from developing their target language. Therefore, it has been suggested that moderate L1 use is strongly advised to prevent these possible issues. In other words, teachers should be proficient in the target language; they should be aware of when to switch to L1 and when to utilize English.

5.2. Teacher's Role

Teachers are the main element in teaching and learning process (Harmer, 2001). They play a vital role in helping students to produce the language accurately and fluently. According to recent theories in teaching and learning, various activities can be employed by language teachers in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the language course. Teachers' beliefs and views about how to teach and improve students learning have progressed in that they are willing to involve their students to be active participants in the classroom and share the teaching and learning process (Cook, 2001). However, there are various challenges that teachers might

face when they introduce the language and avoid using the students' mother tongue. One of the factors that teachers might encounter is how to encourage their students to be willing to communicate using only the target language as many students feel shy and hesitant when they feel that they lack self-confidence in speaking the language accurately.

It has been argued by Harmer, (2001); Cook, (2001) that teachers need to expand their students' language vocabulary by introducing new words, idioms, and phrases. Moreover, by maximizing exposure to the target language L2, acting out meanings, and avoid using students' mother tongue L1, a positive environment can be created in which students feel motivated to communicate using the target language. According to Brown (2007) when students learn practicing speaking in a social setting they can learn how to use the knowledge and the structure of the language.

5.3. Teachers' Methods of Teaching

To improve student engagement and performance, it has been suggested that teachers can employ a variety of teaching strategies. There are many ways to motivate and instruct students, as teaching can be depended on a skilful teacher who is able to create a constructive environment where students feel secure and motivated. In other words, students' academic performance and entire learning experience are greatly influenced by effective instruction (Cook, 2001). According to Harmer, (2001) with so many diverse teaching methods at their availability, teachers can adapt their approaches to suit their students' needs and interest. That is to say, teachers are able to design activities that help students to be active learners and be motivated to use the target language.

In order to create an exciting and engaging learning environment that meets the requirements of a wide range of students, effective teachers frequently use different approaches where students are assured of a comprehensive education that enables them to attain success in the future. Accordingly, the classroom learning experience can be substantially improved by comprehending and putting different teaching strategies into practice as every approach has distinct benefits and may be modified to meet various learning goals and styles. Thus, student participation, understanding, and overall learning results can all be strongly impacted by the teaching methods selected by their teacher (Cook, 2001). It can be said that effective teaching is crucial in shaping students' academic success and overall learning experience.

6. Methodology

To collect data for the current study a mixed method was used. According to Dawson (2009, p. 14), quantitative research uses large-scale survey research with techniques like questionnaires or structured interviews to provide data. Thus, gathering numerical data which can be counted and the findings are displayed as tables, graphs, and charts. The other instrument that is a qualitative method. Creswell (2009, p. 22) states that qualitative research "is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". Using qualitative approach in the current study helps the researcher to find out the participants' perspectives towards using L1 in L2 classes. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were deemed appropriate for the target sample in this study. Furthermore, both approaches could aid the researcher in better comprehending the phenomenon being studied.

For collecting quantitative data, a close-ended questionnaire was distributed to sixty teachers. The questionnaire was used in the current study as a tool for data collection because it has probably been the most commonly used data collection tool in social research (Creswell, 2009). In constructing the questionnaires, the researcher took into account the use of straightforward language for the questionnaire items so that all its items will be clear and helpful for the participants to complete. The other tool for collecting qualitative data was conducting semi-

structured interviews with eight teachers to find out their perceptions towards using students' mother tongue when teaching and learning L2.

This study involved 60 teachers from various Al-Ajelat secondary schools. Purposive sampling was used to make sure that teachers who could offer significant information in line with the study's goals.

6.1. Results of the questionnaire

After ensuring that all of the questionnaire responses were accurate and comprehensive, the quantitative data analysis for the study began. The teachers' questionnaire was analysed quantitatively in order to give numbers, and percentages. The findings of the teachers' questionnaire revealed a number of findings that are relevant to the study questions. The first step in the data analysis method was to investigate teachers' perspectives towards using L1 in L2 classes. It was found that 70% of teachers believe that using L1 is important and an integral element of the learning process. The teachers reported that employing L1 guides students to check their understanding towards their objectives and helps teachers to modify their instruction according to their students' needs. In addition, teachers reported that they sometimes code switch to enable students to understand unclear concepts or vocabulary.

The analysis of the questionnaire also showed that 82% of the teachers agreed that teachers' use of the mother tongue should be limited where they need to use English as a medium of instruction most of the time during English lessons. Further the results of the questionnaire revealed that the majority of the teachers use student's mother tongue to clarify any challenges when they realize that their students were encountering difficulties, either in understanding the objectives of the activity or clarifying some difficult words. Additionally, teachers mentioned that they utilize Arabic to draw students' attention and motivate shy or uncooperative students to engage in class.

6.2. Results of the interviews

It is evident from the finding of the semi-structured interviews that the majority of the teachers predominantly employed English as a medium of teaching during English classes, with little to no use of the mother tongue. One of the teachers (3) stated that she code swapping occasionally for various objectives. For instance, she reported " *I occasionally utilize the student's native language (L1) to provide instructions for disciplinary purposes*". In addition, the results obtained showed that T 1, T 4 and T 5 responded that they use L1 when they wanted to facilitate students' learning. The following extracts illustrates their responses:

"I usually code switch to check whether his students understood the objectives of the activity"

Thus, It is clear from the previous excerpt that T1 appeared to ensure that every student knew how to do the given task. By employing the L1 for that activity, the teacher may be sure that the goals of the activity are obvious and the students can be more certain of its purpose.

The data from the semi-structured interview demonstrated that during class, teachers typically communicate with their students in their mother tongue (Arabic) on a variety of topics, such as answering some of the students questions or expressing a desire for further explanation. Teacher 6 stated that " *most of the time I try to ensure that my students avoid using their mother tongue as I believe that unless students practice communicating in English it is difficult to develop his/her ability in learning the language*". As it can be noticed from this excerpt, that the teacher tried not to tolerate using L1 and frequently ask students to speak in English language to help their students practise using English instead of using their mother tongue.

Regarding the role of the teacher, teachers responses showed that most teachers employ traditional teaching methods. The teacher act most of the time as a controller who control all the process of teaching and learning. However, T number 1 stated that the new textbook includes several exercises that call for group and pair work, which means that teachers need to take on the role of a facilitator who assist students in the process of learning. This suggested

that teachers realized the value of encouraging students to progress by acting as a facilitator and try to avoid being the only element in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, those teachers were obviously aware that a positive classroom climate could be created by rejecting their traditional teaching methods and giving students more responsibility for the teaching and learning process.

Nevertheless, all the teachers who were interviewed responded that teacher's role is important as they need to communicate using the target language and they should use L1 whenever only it is needed to help their students learn and develop their ability in speaking English language. It is important to note that the majority of the activities and exercises in the new secondary school textbooks in Libya are intended to be completed communicatively by utilizing pair and group work techniques and English need to be employed as a medium of communication.

7. Conclusion

The results of the teachers' interviews makes it evident that only a small percentage of the six teachers used their mother tongue inside English lessons. The majority of educators acknowledged the value of teaching their students using English language. Teachers, on the other hand, acknowledged that they occasionally find it unavoidable to refrain from speaking in their native tongue. However, teachers who advocate code switching stated that they are sometimes required to utilize L1 for various purposes. They offered a range of answers to support their positions. According to one of the them, as teachers often teach large number of students in one class, it becomes helpful sometimes to use L1 for disciplinary purposes.

This may suggest that these educators frequently use their students' mother tongue to exert control over their classes. Thus, it can be said that it is clear that teachers who occasionally favor code switching view the usage of L1 as a crucial component that cannot be disregarded and could improve student learning. According to the analysis of the interview data, the majority of teachers cited two key issues: the overwhelming number of students in a class and the fixed chair design that makes it difficult to move and utilize for group work activities that could facilitate the role of the teacher. They claimed that the atmosphere in the classroom is unfavorable to the students and makes it difficult for teachers to provide them chances to collaborate and practice speaking the language.

8. Recommendations

Despite highlighting the practices and attitudes of EFL teachers regarding the teaching and learning process and the impact of using the mother tongue when teaching English language in the Libyan context, the study's yielded results cannot be broadly applied due to the small number of volunteer teachers as well as the conflict and instability in Libya. Thus, in order to determine EFL teachers' practices and perspectives towards the influence of using the mother tongue in English classrooms, this study recommends additional research subjects pertaining to the teaching and learning English language procedures. This suggests that more research could investigate this issue to further understand the reasons behind the extensive use of the first language when teaching English language. In addition, further research is still needed, which might be helpful in overcoming some of the problems and challenges that face teachers of English in teaching and learning English language. Such research would concern how to support and raise both teachers' and students' understanding and knowledge of the effectiveness and the disadvantages of implementing the mother tongue in English classes.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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