Student-Teachers' Beliefs on the Use of L1 in EFL Classroom:

A Global Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the English language student-teachers' beliefs about the use of L1 in EFL classroom across the world in the context of ongoing debate among researchers and practitioners whether or not L1 should be used to teach English in ESL or EFL context. This research investigates the opinion of teachers and their reflection upon their students' demands in the Master of Applied Linguistics program at University of Queensland, Australia. These participants have different contexts of teaching English in their home countries. To collect data, four point Likert scale questionnaire was used. Data after calculations and analysis is presented in the table and discussed. Results indicate that the limited use of L1 is not unnecessary and has positive effects in certain activities.

Keywords: EFL classroom, second language teaching, teacher's beliefs, use of L1 in EFL

1. Introduction

Research on second and foreign language teaching methodologies show considerable shift in the practitioners' views towards the use of first language in L2 classroom in the history. The main reason for the shift has been the change in the popularity of the different teaching approaches and methodologies over time. Early teaching practices had a widespread use of L1 in teaching any other language, and it was considered impossible to teach a second language without using the first language of the learners. Grammar translation method had long been popular which promoted bilingual approach and extensive use of the first language of the learners. Proponents of the method think that teachers' directions in L1 are easy to understand and it saves the communicative breakdowns. It is also believed that it is very easy to explain the concepts and lexical parallels and equivalents in the first language (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

In the latter half of the last century "monolingual" approach got more popularity though audio-lingual method was already in practice since the early nineteenth century. Bilingual teaching and grammar translation received heavy criticism and considered to have negative effects on the learning process. As a result policy maker and educationist stressed more on the use of the target language to teach L2, and thought it was the best way of learning and teaching L2 (Howatt 1984, Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Furthermore, they believed that direct language approach provides learners' with maximum exposure to the practice the target language, gives opportunity to take risk and negotiate the meanings with fellow learners. Recent trends in methodology show that the use of only one- language could not uphold its authority, in spite of its worldwide influence and there has always been opposition and debate (Phillipson, 1992; Auerbach, 1993).

2. Background of the Study

Literature on the topic show that practices of English language teaching in the educational institutions both at lower and tertiary levels are heavily dependent upon on the teacher s' discrete autonomy around the world. Teachers exert great influence on methodology and class room activities. These practices are largely driven by their beliefs, regardless to the institutional and government policy whatever they emphasis. Current research on the topic shows great degree of disagreement among the opinion of the practitioners and researchers. One group of researchers totally rejects the efficacy of use of L1 and propagates the only use L2 to maximize the exposure of the learner to the target language. While others are against the total deletion of L1 form L2 classroom, and they insist on at least judicious use of L1 for specific purposes to maximize the learning opportunity.

Research on the topic is multifaceted, as every study addresses certain aspect of L1 use and provides certain implications for the teaching. Some researchers survey actual practices in the classroom and compared it with the beliefs and perceptions of teachers and students about it. Several studies investigate the purposes and functions of its use. Results of the studies show that there is some degree of confusion whether or not L1 should be used and if it has some value, in their point of view, then when and what amount of L1 should be used in L2 classroom. This study aims to investigate the perception and beliefs of the student-teachers from different parts of the world about the efficacy and occasion of L1 use according to their teaching and learning experience.

3. Significance and Purpose

Many studies have been conducted to know the perceptions of both student and teachers about the use of L1 as well as actual practice in the classroom. These studies were mostly conducted in certain classroom context or only in one institution in specific countries. Existing literature miss the availability of any study which could give the holistic view of teachers form different parts of the world having different teaching situation. This study tries to give a global perspective that what teachers of English language from different parts of the world having different teaching context and level, believe and practice regarding the use of L1 in EFL classroom. This study hopefully will provide EFL teachers with an overview about the global practices about the use of L1 in EFL classroom.

4. Literature Review

Research in second language acquisition (SLA) reveals that first language of the learner's plays important role in the learning process of L2. Concepts of inter-language and language transfer have been investigated by a number of researchers who found significant influence of the first language on the L2 learning. Learners use the prior linguistic knowledge to construct and use new language. Such outcomes provide strong reason and theoretical evidence in support of its use. In this regard, Ellis (2008) claims that learners tend to build their interim rules by using their L1 knowledge in the process of target language learning. He observes that student think in L1 and then translate their ideas to the target language.

Krashen (1982) also acknowledges that there is strong influence of the surface structure of the L1 on the surface structure of L2. Similarly (Cook, 1992), in support of L1 use, declares that second language learners generally access their L1, while processing the L2. He stresses teachers that L1 should not be ignored in teaching L2 because it can isolate learners and it is remains permanently in the mind of L2 learners, whether the teachers use it or not. Auerbach (1993) also agrees with Cook 1992, and to add bit more in the idea says, "L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English."

On the other hand, we also find many arguments against the use of L1 in teaching of L2. Many studies exist which found evidence of negative influence of L1; therefore they insist on use of only target language for teaching L2. They found that overuse of L1 reduced the learners' exposure to the target language input (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). According to Lightbown and Spada (1999) the patterns transferred from the L1 are definitely the fundamental sources of errors in the L2 learning. Similarly emphasis on the 'comprehensible input' and 'meaning' by Krashan and Terrel (1983) also demands the maximum exposure to the target language in L2 classroom.

However, later research shows that inspite of great popularity of monolingual approach and direct method under the influence of above mentioned studies, L1 could not be excluded from the pedagogy of language education. These later studies prove that without making some or at least minimal use of L1 teaching of L2 is very difficult. According to these studies total deletion of L1 in L2 classroom is not appropriate (Schweers, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Tang, 2002). When students' especially at the elementary or beginner level are prohibited to use L1 or forced to use only target language, they are found unable to communicate and their confusion often lead to great discouragement. They may feel completely confused, alienated and insecure (Boukella, 2001).

Many recent studies, considering the benefits of L1 use, focuses more on its productive use and analyze the teachers' and students' perceptions that why and when they find L1 useful in the classroom. Studies by Macaro, 2001, and Tang, 2002 Nation, 2003, focus on the actual classroom practices and they investigate the reasons and amount of L1 use by the teachers and student during teaching and learning process. Similarly, Dash (2002), Nazary (2008), Prodromou (2002) and Schweers (1999) explores the student and teacher's beliefs and attitude towards use of L1 in their practices.

Regarding the benefits and purposes of L1 use, Wang and Hyun (2009) in Taiwan discovered that Learners use L1 not only for class activities like making sentences and learning vocabulary, but they also use L1 for their

private discussions during the class time. Tang 2002 also conducted a similar study. He found that EFL teachers use L1 to explain the meaning of difficult words and complex grammar ideas. He concluded that most of teachers (70%) are in favor of L1 use, as they can help their students understand difficult things and to supports class activates.

Macro 2001 in his study tried to know the amount of L1 use in the real classroom practice. His findings conclude that teachers use of L1was minimal and occasional. Similarly Dash (2002) in his study found that both teachers and students tend to use L1 whenever they feel difficulty in communication. Edstom (2006) while doing self-evaluation asserts that though use of L2 should be increased, yet L1 use at certain points is his moral obligation to his student especially when they are confused and unable to move with L2.

Study by Bateman (2008) reveals that his participants believe on use of L2 in order to provide the maximum exposure to the target language, however, L1 could also be used when clarification is required on the certain point when students are unable to understand anything or to maintain the class discipline. Al-Nofaie (2010) conducted a similar study which discloses the teachers and students perceptions about the use of L1 in Saudi Arabia. He concludes that both teachers and student showed positive attitude towards the occasional use of L1.

Nazary (2008) carried out a similar study in the context of Iran at university level. Results of his study show that 85% students, studying various subjects, have positive attitude towards to use of L1 in L2 classes. Another study by Aqel (2006) explored the teachers and student attitude towards the use of L1 in at university level in Qatar and he also found the positive view about the judicious use of Arabic whenever it is required.

From the above discussion we can conclude that those who are against the use of L1, they have strong reason when they emphasis on to maximize the learner's exposure to the target language as once student rely on L1 for help, learning new words or complicated concept of grammar, they never take risk and negotiate for meaning in the target language. However, despite some negative effects of L1, these empirical studies suggest that it is not possible to totally avoid the use of L1 in L2 classes, especially when both teacher and students share the same L1 (Song 2009). Proponents of L1 use in L2 classes also have strong reasons to support their view. They also believe that excessive and untimely use of the first language causes negative effects on the learning process. However, its minimal use can help the beginners or weak learners to overcome their confusions and anxiety.

By looking at above mentioned studies, we can realize that still there is great confusion among the researchers and practitioners which demands further research on the topic. Furthermore, most of the studies were conducted in context of certain level, or only in one institute in a specific country. My current study in not limited to a specific level, institute or country. It bring together the perception of teachers and their reflection upon their students' demands and needs, from diverse background and I hope it will to give a universal and holistic view about the use of L1 in teaching English as second and foreign language which could have implications for better teaching of English as a foreign language.

5. Research Question

What do EFL teachers, from different backgrounds, actually believe about the use of L1 in L2 classroom?

6. Method

6.1 Context and Participants

This study is conducted at the School of languages and comparative cultural studies University of Queensland Australia. A total 23 local and International (two native and 21 non-native student teachers participated in the study. All participants are enrolled in Master of Applied Linguistics TESOL program. 18 participants have previous teaching experience prior to their enrollment in the course while five participants did not have previous teaching experience. However, they are future teacher as they after completion their Master TESOL, they intend to start teaching English in their home countries.

Non-native participants are from Pakistan, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Chile, Columbia, Taiwan, Vietnam, China, Korea and Thailand where English is taught is a foreign language. Among natives, one teacher knows Japanese, and she has taught ESL in Japan.

6.2 Data collection Instrument and Procedure

The participants were asked to complete a closed-ended questionnaire consisted of 25 statements regarding the use of L1. This survey examined not only the beliefs of participants, but also the amount and the purpose of the use of L1 in L2 classroom. The participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 4-point Likert scale from 1=strongly disagree and 4=strongly agree. Data was calculated in term of the percentage on every statement and then 'mean' was calculated to measure the degree of overall

opinion about each statement.

7. Results

The following table presents the main outcomes emerging from the data obtained in this study according to the statements in the questionnaire. Data were analyzed by calculating the number of respondents who agreed or disagreed to different degrees with the different aspect specified by each statement included in the survey. Table reports the results of the analysis with agreement percentages and 'mean' for every statement.

Table 1. Main outcomes

Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)	Total	Mean
Statement 1. My students like my use of L1 in English classrooms to explain grammar rules.					
4.34 %	26.8 %	30.4 %	39.1 %	100 %	3.04
Statement 2. My students like my use of L1 for classroom management (e.g. giving instructions and groupings students).					
8.7 %	13 %	52.17 %	26 %	100 %	2.95
Statement 3. My students like my use of L1 in General English classrooms to explain the meaning of a new vocabulary.					
4.34 %	21.7 %	60.8 %	13 %	100 %	2.82
Statement 4. When I use L1 in English classrooms, students will tend to speak more L1 than English in the classroom.					
0 %	0 %	43.5 %	56.5 %	100 %	3.56
Statement 5. The more I make use of L1, the less effort students make to understand my use of English.					
4.34 %	21.7 %	39 %	34.78 %	100 %	3.04
Statement 6. My students like my use of English for explaining simple grammatical terms and concepts and L1 for more difficult terms and concepts.					
4.34 %	17.4 %	60.85 %	17.4 %	100 %	2.91
Statement 7. Teachers should not use L1 in English classrooms because it reduces the amount of students' exposure to English.					
4.34 %	47.8 %	39 %	8.69 %	100 %	2.52
Statement 8. The use of L1 should be minimized in English classrooms.					
0 %	26%	43.4%	30.4 %	100 %	2.91
Statement 9. Learners should be translating the English language into L1 when they read a text.					
43.47 %	43.47 %	8.69 %	4.34 %	100 %	1.73
Statement 10. The only way to learn an English word completely is to know its meaning in L1.					
43.47 %	47.8 %	4.34 %	0 %	100 %	1.65
Statement 11. I like to ask my students to translate a word or sentence into L1 as a comprehension check.					
17.4%	52.17 %	26 %	4.34 %	100 %	2.17
Statement 12. My students like my use of English to give homework in English class.					
0 %	34.78 %	56.52 %	8.69 %	100 %	2.73
Statement 13. I do not like the use of L1 because it prevents students from thinking in English					
4.34 %	34.78 %	47.8 %	8.69 %	100 %	3.04

Statement 14. I sometimes speak L1 to clarify my directions					
4.34 %	8.69%	69.56 %	17.39 %	100 %	3.00
Statement 15. When students speak L1 in the English class, it makes me disappointed.					
0 %	56.52 %	30.43 %	13%	100 %	2.56
Statement 16. I like to use L1 for giving individual comments					
0 %	60.86 %	30.43%	8.69 %	100 %	2.47
Statement 17. The use of L1 in English classrooms reduces students' anxiety.					
17.39 %	17.39 %	60.86 %	4.34 %	100 %	2.52
Statement 18. I find my students frightened when they do not understand what I am saying in English in the English class.					
4.34 %	26 %	47.82 %	21.73 %	100 %	2.86
Statement 19. The medium of instruction should be only English in English classroom.					
8.69 %	30.43 %	39 %	21.73 %	100 %	2.73
Statement 20. My students feel more comfortable when I talk to them in L1.					
17.39 %	8.69 %	60.86 %	13 %	100 %	2.69
Statement 21. My students can understand the lesson much better if I use L1.					
4.34 %	39 %	43.47 %	13 %	100 %	2.65
Statement 22. The use of L1 by my students can help them to express their feelings and ideas that they cannot explain in English					
4.34 %	8.69 %	60.86 %	26 %	100 %	3.04
Statement 23. I prefer to ask questions to my students in L1.					
34.78 %	65.21 %	0 %	0 %	100 %	1.65
Statement 24. It is necessary to explain the differences and similarities between L1 and English in L1					
0 %	52.17 %	30.43 %	17.39 %	100 %	2.65
Statement 25. I prefer to use bilingual dictionaries.					
8.69 %	43.47 %	39.13 %	4.34 %	100 %	2.30

Hashemi and Sabet, 2013.

Response of teachers to Item 1, 2 and 3 reflects the students' great demands to their teachers to use L1 to explain grammar rules and instructions for class activities and management and learn new vocabulary. Majority agree that students, (69.5%) in teachers' point of view, like them to use L1 for explaining grammar rules. Similarly answers to statement 6 shows that students (60% agree and 17.4 strongly agree) tend to understand difficult terms and concepts of grammar in L1. Teachers' beliefs about classroom management are also in line with student expectations as 69.56% agree and 17.39 strongly agree that they use L1 for clarifications of their directions for the classroom activities. Teachers' response to statement 12 also reflects that their students (56% agree) want teachers to use L1 at the time of giving and explain assignments and homework. These all responses show that teachers are in favor of judicious use of for particular activities where L1 can support well as compared to use of L2 for the same.

One the other hand students, according to teachers' observation, demand more use of L1 in for many other things but teacher have the opposite views. There is some degree of disagreement in students' expectations and teachers' belief about teaching vocabulary in L1. Response to statements 3 and 9 reveals students' high expectations from teachers regarding reading and learning vocabulary in L1. 60.8% agree and 13% strongly agree that their students want to learn vocabulary in L1. While teachers belief in response to item 10 show that (43.47% strongly disagree and 47.8% disagree) L1 is not the only way to learn vocabulary. It proves that teachers tend to teach vocabulary more through use of the target language instead of L1.

For reading text (item 9), there is strong agreement against translation of English text into L1 between teachers belief and students' expectations. 86% (43.47% strongly disagree and 43.47% disagree) teachers do not want their student to translate text into L1 for comprehension of the text. However, 30.34% (26 agree and 4.34% strongly agree) think it is ok to ask their student to translate a word or just sentence for comprehension check. It shows that majority of teachers are not in favor of translation of the texts in L1.

Regarding English as only medium of communication (statement 7), there is sharp divide among students expectations, as around 52% disagreed to use only target language in the class, while 48% favored the statement that L1 should not be used because it reduces the student's amount of exposure to the target language. On the other hand, according to the teachers' beliefs (Statement 4 and 5) extensive use of L1 has negative effect on students' performance. Majority of teachers (agree 43.5 and strongly agree 56.5) agree not to use L1 a lot because when they as a teacher use L1 in the class student are more like to speak more and more in L1. Teachers are also agreed that more use of L1 has another negative effect, as they do less effort to understand things in English (item 5. agree 39 and strongly 34.78).

Furthermore, teacher's response for statement 13 reflects third major disadvantage of L1 use, as 47.8 agree and 8.69 strongly agree that extensive use of L1 also stops their students to think in English. In addition, they all disagreed to item 23 which asked them whether they prefer to ask questions in L1. Similarly 82% disagree about the importance of explaining the differences and similarities between L1 and L2 in statement 25. In case of these statements teachers seem to use L1 for specific purpose where it can be more beneficial.

However, it is strange that 56.57% teachers do not mind if their students use L1 in the class, while 43.43% feel disappointed when students use L1 in the class. They greatly believe that, as 60.86% agree in response to the item, that use of L1 reduce the students' anxiety. Similarly 69.55 agree that when they use only English their students are frightened. Answer to statement 20 also reveals the positive effects that says student feel more comfortable when L1 is used in the class. That is why all teachers are not agreed to use only English as a medium of classroom communication, though 60.73% agreed upon it in the response of statement 19.

8. Discussion

In this study results show that teachers tend to use more and more English in their classroom except in particular circumstances and needs where they find no other choice but use L1 to assist some students. While using English most of the time they believe that L1 should not be completely banned in L2 classroom as it sometimes help reducing anxiety and building environment for a student centered classroom keeping sociocultural aspects in mind (Aubach, 1993). According to the teachers, their students sometimes also expect them to translate which sometimes could be a good language learning activity (Duff, 1989). In addition, L1 use could be allowed to their students very occasionally for comprehension checks (Schweers, 1999).

Among the proponents of 'only target language' in the class, Ellis (1984) also recognizes that L1 use actually depends on the instructional context. It means that teachers should use English and also encourage students to communicate in English, however, when they feel that L1 use for specific purpose could be beneficial, they should situationally can use L1 or allow their student to use L1, especially when a learner with low proficiency of English gets stuck, feels anxiety and as a result is unable to express anything. Statistics also show that students expect more use of L1 because they feel more comfortable; however, teachers believe that more use of L1 maximize the learners' exposure to the target language and it could help them to learn the target language faster (Ellis, 2005).

9. Conclusion

All the teachers in this study have worked in different contexts in their countries. Their beliefs about the use of the L1 to teach English demonstrated that they have some degree of disagreement. However, these contradictions seem to be due to their diversity in the contexts of their teaching practices. Despite their conflicts in their beliefs, all teachers are undivided in their belief that the use of L1 should be as limited as possible (Atkinson, 1987). They believe that English should be the main vehicle of classroom communication as it could give ample opportunity to practice English and help them to learn it by negotiation of meaning (Schweers, 1999). Excessive use of English can have negative effects on the learning process. However, at the same time they do not rule out the limited positive use of L1 (Aubach, 1993). They also believe that there could be a strong role of students' L1 in specific activities, like explaining complex grammar concepts, instructions for class activities and classroom management etc.

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