



Short Communication

Perceptions of Jawzjan University Engineering Graduates towards using First Language in EFL Classes

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Abstract

This article highlights a part of the findings of the study on perception of engineering students at graduate level about the ELP (English Language Program) at Jawzjan University towards using first language in their classes. The findings discovered that participants of this program were supportive to the dominative use of L2 during the EFL classes and they were critical about the extensive usage of L1 in the same.

Keywords: L1 (First language), L2 (Second Language), Monolingual, Bilingual, Perception.

Introduction

The question whether we should use L1 in EFL classes has evolved into a critical issue in recent years among researchers and language teachers. It is a debatable topic because several theories of L2 support suggestions regarding the use of L1 during class contact hours. Theorists and English language instructors believe it to be helpful to take help from L1 in certain conditions. For example, introducing new words, describing difficult grammatical structures and management of the class and taking suggestions¹. L1 can be used to enhance learners' comprehension of L2². Furthermore, Cole argues that L1 is very helpful for beginners since students at this level do not have much knowledge about L2³. Using L1 also helps to distinguish the main difference between L1 and L2, and reduce the students' uncertainty about the exact meaning of words. It motivates students and reduces their anxiety. Moreover, some language experts and educators consider using L1 as an important factor for instruction purpose only^{2,4}. On the other hand, some theorist recommends the use of L2 only during the class. Supporters of the use of L2 only argue that only the use of target language during class contact hours can bring success. Therefore, it would be keeping students deprived on the part of the instructor from the opportunity of learning the target language where some additional input could be achieved regarding the target language^{5,6}.

Likewise, in Japan, Clark states that overuse of L1 is observed as a restriction to practical teaching in many secondary level classrooms, and there is an effort to encourage English language teachers to avoid using traditional-translation method and to implement more communicative teaching methods⁷.

Review of the Relevant Literature: Many studies have already been conducted previously, to investigate the perception of

students and the attitude of teachers towards use of L1 in English as a second language classes in various contexts.

De La Campa and Nassaji conducted stimulated recall sessions to explore the reasons and purposes of using students' L1 in German L2 classrooms⁸. They recorded one experienced and one novice teachers' L2 classes, and then they interviewed the teachers. Their investigation explored that the teachers used L1 in their teaching extensively. The findings also showed that the novice teacher used L1 mostly for translation, while the experienced teacher used L1 specifically for refreshing the class environment through making personal comments and jokes.

A Similar study was conducted by Al-Nofaie on teachers' and students' attitudes towards using Arabic in L2 classes⁹. The investigation showed that both teachers and students had positive inclination toward using L1 in their classes. Learners took the use of L1 as a positive practice in certain circumstances. Their educators highlighted the significant role of the first language in their classes. On the other hand, teachers declared that extensive use of first language should be avoided, because too much use of L1 may slow down the learning process.

In a same vein, Wilkerson conducted a research study in order to find the use of English as the first language whereas the target language was Spanish by the teachers¹⁰. The findings showed that by surprise, five faculty members with similar academic background used both L1 and L2 extensively in different amounts. The researchers discovered that some teachers taught in L1 (English) with minimum use of L2 (Spanish) from start to finish and some other teachers mostly taught in L2 but sometimes switching to L1 in translating and re-teaching lessons out of the class. The findings of study discovered that teachers used L1 mainly to manage classroom interactions, class

activities, reduce waiting time and control turn taking by students. Moreover, the teachers switched to L1 to avoid uncertainty, save time, keep authority, and manage classroom in good manner.

Anh carried out a research to investigate attitudes of the teachers at Vietnamese universities towards the use of L1 for English language pedagogy¹¹. The findings showed that in certain circumstances using L1 is necessary for teaching English. This study showed that all participants unanimously were in the favor of using L1 in their L2 classes. The teachers declared that the use of L1 was included in their teaching method. They added that use of L1 could contribute positively in the learning process.

Methodology

Participants: Eight engineers, graduated from various faculties of engineering at Jawzjan University participated in this study. The participants were employed by China National Petroleum Company (Watan Group). CNPCWG, a multinational petroleum refinery company, has been operating in Afghanistan for five years. The staff includes both local and foreign staff members. The language used as lingua franca is English in that company. The total number of local engineers is around 40 - 50. A convenience sampling was administered to select the subjects and eight of those were volunteered to take part in this study.

Instrument: This study is a part of an investigation about the English language needs of engineering undergraduates. Interviews of participants were conducted on one for one basis in order to elicit out information regarding the perception of participants towards the use of first language in EFL classrooms. English is taught as part of their curriculum at JU. The question used for eliciting out information and its respective finding are as follows: Should the instructors of English language use the first language during the class?

Results and Discussion

Depending on their preferences and their teaching environment, English language instructors use different methodologies for teaching English in EFL classes. The resources available to them, proficiency level of learners and the professional abilities of the instructors play a vital role in deciding what would actually be taking place in the real pedagogical environment. The aim of this study was to investigate the trend of preferences and perception of learners towards the use of first language in their English language classes.

In the followings, view of participants are grouped as per their similarities: i. "In my point of view, it would be better not to use local languages in English classes. The English instructors should try to teach using different teaching methods." (P1), ii. "No, teachers should not use common languages of the country in English language classes." (C2), iii. "The teachers should not

allow students to use official languages of the country in an English language class. The teachers as well as students should not use the first language during teaching. He/she should use different teaching techniques in their lessons." (P3)

On the other hand there were just the opposite type of opinions as well. Such participants favored the use of L1 EFL classrooms. Their opinions are presented as follows: i. "Personally, I prefer to use first language in English classes. Because learners have followed the same method since their primary school till university study. Also their English language proficiency level is low. It would be difficult for the students to get the teachers, if they do not use first language." (P5), ii. "In general using local languages in English classes is not good. But sometimes for better understanding it is good." (C3), iii. "Based on the curriculum, they take just 6 credits for the whole of their higher education. They are not at this level to know all materials in English. It would be better to use first language occasionally." (P2).

In any event, most of the interviewees supported that in English classes the local languages should not be used. The participants urged that the instructors should increase their methodological abilities and utilize different teaching approaches instead of using L1 in EFL classrooms.

Discussion: The use of mother tongues by students and teachers in English language classes is a debatable issue. Supporters of both monolingual and bilingual approaches emphasize their own claims about the usage of mother tongues in language classes. The findings of this research study showed that participants' views vary about using L1 language in L2 classes. They can be divided into two contrastive groups.

Monolingual approach supporters: Prohibition of Using Mother Tongues: The findings revealed that the participants absolutely avoided using mother tongues. They claim that target language should be the language of instruction during in the classrooms. And L1 should not be allowed at all because it obstructs learning process. Their perception is in line with¹². These participants argued that the teachers should use different types of teaching methods and provide opportunities in order to transfer the new knowledge to learners instead of using L1. Their perceptions support the belief that foreign language can be learnt much better if only the same is used during the entire learning process¹³.

Bilingual approach supporters 2: Use of Mother Tongues: This group of the participants perceived that the teachers should use learners' mother tongue in specific circumstances, such as teaching new lexical items, provide feedback and explain grammatical structures. Furthermore, the findings of the study underscore the importance of learners' L1 in enhancing L2 learning, in particular in the vocabulary and grammar teaching of L2. It is elicited out from findings that using learners' L1 has the ability to develop learning. However, it does not mean that

L1 use should be employed widely. It is also elicited out that learners' L1 needs to be employed effectively and carefully. The participants' opinions are in line with Ellis who suggested the minimum possible use of L1 for learning a target language¹⁴.

Researcher's Assertion: To conclude, my observation that I have many years of teaching experience in Afghanistan, it would be very helpful to use L2 as the language of instruction and switch to L1 only in a situation where it is virtually inevitable. The use of L1 should be replaced as much as possible with different methodologies and such factors should be taken into consideration like first language influences, learners' interests and their cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

The study revealed that former students of engineering faculties of Jawzjan University supported the use of L2 only, for teaching English to engineering undergraduates and were not in the favor of the use of L1 widely. The perception of the participants in this research was found to be different as compared to participants' perception revealed in other studies. The argument presented here should not be considered to be inflexible, because it is complete confirmation of Ellis statement that use of first language in a target language class depends on the "instructional context"¹⁵. The sum up of the study could be termed as a reconfirmation for the significant role of L2 in EFL classes.

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