A STUDY ON THE USE OF L1 IN EFL CLASSROOMS: A CLASSROOM-BASED INVESTIGATION

Dilso'z Tursunova Anvajon qizi
UzSWLU, 3rd year student
Scientific supervisor: Xakimova Sadoqat Dilshodbekovna
Teacher of the Department
"Theoretical Aspects of the English Language"

Abstract. The use of students' first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has been a subject of ongoing debate among language educators. While some argue that L1 hinders English exposure and acquisition, others highlight its potential as a scaffold for comprehension, classroom management, and affective support. This study investigates the strategic use of L1 in Uzbek EFL classrooms based on classroom observations and scholarly literature. The study finds that moderate and purposeful use of L1 can enhance language learning, particularly among beginner and intermediate students.

Keywords: L1 use, EFL classrooms, bilingual education, code-switching, language acquisition, teacher strategies, student comprehension

Annotatsiya. O'zbek EFL sinflarida o'quvchilarning ona tilidan (L1) foydalanish masalasi hanuzgacha muhokamalarga sabab bo'lmoqda. Ayrim o'qituvchilar bu yondashuv ingliz tilida to'liq muhit yaratishga xalaqit berishini ta'kidlasa, boshqalar esa L1ning tushunishni osonlashtirish va psixologik qo'llab-quvvatlashdagi rolini qayd etishadi. O'tkazilgan sinf kuzatuvlari shuni ko'rsatadiki, ayniqsa boshlang'ich va o'rta bosqichdagi o'quvchilar uchun L1dan me'yorida foydalanish til o'rganishni sezilarli darajada yengillashtiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: L1dan foydalanish, EFL sinflari, ikki tillik ta'lim, kod almashtirish, til o'zlashtirish, o'qituvchilik strategiyalari

Introduction

Language teaching methodologies have long emphasized the importance of using the target language (L2) exclusively in the classroom. However, recent pedagogical perspectives have begun to re-evaluate the role of learners' first language (L1) in second language acquisition. In EFL contexts like Uzbekistan, where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, L1 can serve as a crucial tool for supporting comprehension and classroom communication.

As Cook (2001) argues, "L1 can be a powerful resource in language teaching when used judiciously it promotes learner confidence and helps bridge gaps in understanding." Similarly, Auerbach (1993) suggests that "systematic use of L1 validates students' linguistic identity and supports meaningful participation." Rather than viewing L1 as a barrier, educators are increasingly recognizing its pedagogical potential.

This classroom-based investigation seeks to understand how and when L1 is used by teachers in real EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan. Through lesson observations and literature synthesis, the study highlights strategies that balance L1 support with maximum L2 exposure. The central question is not whether to use L1 or not but how to use it to scaffold learning without creating dependency. The use of comparative examples of phraseological units is of particular importance in English language teaching. Notably, the studies conducted by S. Xakimova (2024) in this area can be used effectively.

In classroom reality, the use of L1 often occurs spontaneously and unconsciously especially when learners struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary, complex instructions, or abstract grammar concepts. In these situations, teachers may switch to L1 to prevent confusion or disengagement. This flexible use of L1 helps maintain the pace of the lesson and fosters a supportive learning environment. Particularly in beginner-level classes, the occasional switch to L1 reduces learners' affective filter and encourages participation.

However, the decision to use L1 must be guided by clear pedagogical intent rather than convenience. Overreliance on the first language can inhibit learners' exposure to the target language and slow down their development of English fluency. Thus, educators must strike a careful balance between accessibility and immersion.

The role of L1 is also influenced by cultural, institutional, and linguistic factors. In Uzbekistan, for instance, many EFL learners share the same L1 (Uzbek or Russian), which creates a shared linguistic context. This makes the use of L1 more feasible and, at times, more efficient. Yet, it also raises important questions: How much L1 is too much? In what types of activities is L1 acceptable or even beneficial? And how can teachers manage the shift back to English after using L1?

By investigating these questions through real classroom examples and established theoretical frameworks, this study aims to offer practical recommendations for the optimal and responsible use of L1 in EFL classrooms. It also contributes to the growing recognition that bilingualism, when embraced thoughtfully, can be a resource not a restriction in language teaching.

The findings of this classroom-based study suggest that L1, when used strategically and sparingly, plays a supportive role in EFL instruction. It aids in clarifying instructions, explaining complex grammar points, managing classroom behavior, and reducing student anxiety.

These benefits are particularly evident at lower proficiency levels, where L1 serves as a cognitive and emotional scaffold.

As Macaro (2009) notes, "A total ban on L1 is neither practical nor pedagogically sound; what matters is how and why it is used." The key to effective L1 use lies in purposeful integration using it not as a substitute for English but as a bridge to deeper understanding and more meaningful L2 engagement.

Ultimately, L1 should not be viewed as the enemy of English acquisition. Instead, it should be considered a tool within the teacher's methodological repertoire one that, when applied thoughtfully, can enhance comprehension, increase student confidence, and support linguistic development. Future teacher training programs should include guidance on how to use L1 effectively, with attention to learner level, task type, and instructional goals.

References

1. Cook, V. (2001). Using the First Language in the Classroom. Canadian Modern Language Review, 57(3), 402–423.
2. Auerbach, E. R. (1993). Reexamining English Only in the ESL Classroom. TESOL Quarterly, 27(1), 9–32.
3. Xakimova S. Frazeologik birliklarning semantik klassifikatsiyasi (2023). https://zenodo.org/records/8242958/files/305-314.pdf
4. Macaro, E. (2009). Teacher use of codeswitching in the second language classroom: Exploring 'optimal' use. In Turnbull, M. & Dailey-O'Cain, J. (Eds.), First language use in second and foreign language learning (pp. 35–49). Multilingual Matters.