Using Arabic in Teaching English to Arabic-Speaking Learners (From Teachers' and Students' Point of View)

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate and analyse teachers' and students' views towards using Arabic in teaching English in secondary schools in Oneizah Province, Saudi Arabia. The data were collected by means of two questionnaires: one for teachers and the other for students. The subjects were 43 teachers of English, 12 were female. 120 male students from four different secondary schools in Oneizah. The results of the study showed that Arabic language (The students' mother tongue) could be used during English language lessons although teachers' responses gave less support for using Arabic. Also, the results revealed that Arabic has positive roles to play in teaching English besides facilitating learning process. The recommendations emphasize and encourage teachers and supervisors to pay attention to their learners need in using their mother tongue. Moreover, Arabic language can be a means of facilitation not a hindrance so it can be used in many activities inside the classroom without affecting students' exposure to English language. Also, there should be a place for learners' mother tongue in the syllabus, e.g. in translation exercises and bilingual dictionaries.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Monolingual approach, Mother, Tongue

1. Introduction

Using English only to teach English is the most apparent principle in ESL / TEFL teaching for very long time, but now some teachers feel that the mother tongue has an active role in foreign language learning. This issue, using the mother tongue (L1) in an English classroom is very complicated. While communicative methodology has always praised the famous" English Only" approach, many researchers start strongly to support the use of mother tongue in foreign/second language learning especially in monolingual classes. They claim that the mother tongue in foreign language classrooms has long been neglected. They believe that its potential as classroom resource is great and its role should be given considerable attention in

TESOL/TEFL

Although this topic is important, till now it is not discussed thoroughly among teachers and learners in the Middle East in particular. So this paper tries to examine how English teachers and students in Saudi Arabia respond to mother tongue (Arabic language) use in their classrooms.

The hypotheses of this study are:

1) Arabic language as a mother tongue is used during English language lessons and has roles to play in learning English as a foreign language.

2) Using of Arabic language does not hinder the learning of English language but it actually facilitates it.

2. Literature Review

The history of L1 use in the classroom reveals regular changes in how it viewed (Auerbach, 1993). There have been different views about whether to use the mother tongue of the students in the foreign language classroom. The monolingual approach suggests that the target language ought to be the sole medium of communication, implying the prohibition of the native language would maximize the effectiveness of learning the target language (Tang, 2002). There are prominent scholars who support using English only as Krashen, Dulay and Heidi (Krashen, 1982) emphasizes that a new language is acquired through exposure. The role of English in language class is not just the medium of instructions but the teaching content. The interaction language between students and teachers is the objective of the teaching.

On the other hand, (Atkinson, 1987) supports strongly the use of mother tongue in second language teaching especially monolingual classes. He says that the function of the mother tongue in L2 classrooms has long been neglected. He points out the methodological gap in the literature concerning the use of mother tongue and argues a case in favour of its restricted and principled use mainly in accuracy-oriented tasks. There are many other many supporters for using mother tongue in teaching the foreign or second language. e.g. Tang, Duff and Cook, (Cook, 2001) who writes of "a door that has been firmly shut in language teaching for over a hundred years…however the assumption is phrased, the L2 is seen as positive, the L1 negative recent methods do not so much forbid the L1 as ignore its existence…most teaching manuals take the avoidance of the L1 as so obvious that no classroom use of the L1 is ever mentioned" (Cook, 2001).

2.1 Previous Studies

How do students and teachers view the usage of their mother tongue in learning a foreign language? Schweers (1999) investigated Spanish students who studied EFL, to find out their attitudes toward using L1 in the L2 classroom. His results indicate that the majority of students and teachers agreed that Spanish should be used in the EFL classroom. Schweers concluded that (1999: 37) "recognizing and welcoming their own language into the classroom as an expression of their own culture could be one way of dispelling negative attitudes toward

English and increasing receptivity to learning the language". On the same way Burden (2000) carries out a similar study on the use of the native language in four Japanese universities and he comes out with similar findings. He also notices that the better the student, the less support is needed from the mother tongue and most of the advanced learners need the mother tongue for grammatical explanations. Prodromou (2002) studied the perception of 300 Greek students about L1 use in the monolingual classroom at three different levels (beginner, intermediate and advanced). A relatively high percentage of beginner and intermediate students answered that both the teacher and the students should use the mother tongue, while only minority of advanced learners supported those views. Moreover, in other question asking students to consider whether "explaining differences in the use of L1 and L2 may be useful, percentages of positive answers increase in all three level groups. Tang (2002) conducted a study in China with Chinese speakers. And both students and teacher responded positively towards its use" (Tang, 2002)" The research seems to show that limited and judicious use of the mother tongue in the English classroom does not reduce students' exposure to English". In Ferrer (2002) comparative study of students' teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions whether there is a role for mother tongue in the monolingual classroom, On the whole all three groups perceive the mother tongue as a legitimate tool to use when exploring the workings of the target grammar system, although, again, advanced students are the most reluctant. Miles (2004) in his M.A. thesis tries to measure the effects of using L1 (Japanese) on learning English language. The results show that the use of L1 in the classroom does not seem to hinder learning of L2, and in fact seems to facilitate it in some situations. However, results show that English-only can help learning and lead to improvements. Shimizu (2006) conducted study entitled "Monolingual or Bilingual Policy in the Classroom". The sample of the study was 98 fourth-year students at two Japanese universities. 60 of them were English majors. English major participants were less likely to agree with L1 use than non-English major student participants. As the vast majority of non-English major student participants found this preferable, and 73% of English major student participants also responded positively. Both English major participants and non-English participants liked teachers L1 use. Shimiziu (2006) concluded his study by adding that the appropriate and judicious use of the L1 can be beneficial for students as well as teachers. Although it is not sufficient to indicate to teachers that L1 use has direct positive effects on learners' English acquisition, it does indicate that L1 use can assist them in learning English mainly for affective reasons.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

Data were obtained via two questionnaires for teachers and students. These tools were used to collect data to find out the attitudes of teachers and learners towards using Arabic during English classes.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 43 teachers and 120 students. All the teachers' mother tongue is Arabic. The students were chosen randomly from the four Boys secondary schools, in Oneizah

province, Saudi Arabia. A table of random numbers was used connected with students' names list. They were all Saudi citizens and have been studying English as a foreign language since their first-year intermediate school.

3.3 Study Instrument

57 copies of teachers' questionnaire were distributed to the teachers in Oneizh Province in Saudi Arabia, in the year 2007-2008 (see Appendix A). Only 43 copies were retained.

The translated copy of students' questionnaire (Appendix B) was distributed to 40 students (two classes) as a pilot questionnaire. Two weeks, 120 modified copies were distributed to five classes which were taught by different teachers. The questionnaire was distributed during the lesson, after the students had been told the aim of the questionnaire and given clear instructions in how to fill it. Of course, all the 120 copies were collected because the questionnaire was given during the class time.

4. Results and discussion

To interpret and to identify the most dominant factors in the results of this paper, the statements of the two questionnaires were ordered according to the percentage of agreement among the participants. Tables 1 and 2 present the ranking of the two questionnaires.

Table 1. Ranks of statements in Questionnaire '1'

Item	Statement	Ranks	Percentage
13	Using bilingual dictionaries is helpful for my students	1	87%
2	I occasionally use Arabic in my class.	2	81%
11	Using Arabic never hinders understanding of English.	3	63%
14	I think using translated books for grammar and vocabulary are useful.	4	62%
6-b	It is useful to use Arabic to explain vocabulary.	5	60%
6-a	It is useful to use Arabic to explain grammar	6	54%
3	I allow my students to use Arabic.	7	51.2%
6-d	It is useful to use Arabic to check comprehension	8	41%
10-c	The reason for using Arabic is the students' weak performance in English.	9	41%
8	I think Arabic should be used in my English classes.	10	39%
12-b	Students depend on their mother tongue for comprehension.	11	38.5%
6-e	It is useful to use Arabic to explain the content of a reading text.	12	38%
9-b	I think using Arabic aids students' comprehension	13	36%
10-d	The reason for using Arabic is the environment around the students	14	33.3%
9-d	I think using Arabic raises students' participation	15	28%
6-c	It is useful to use Arabic to give instructions.	16	26%
9-c	Using Arabic helps students feel confident.	17	25.6%

12-a	Students think in their mother tongue more than in English	18	23%
10-b	The reasons for using Arabic are teachers' and students' previous experience	19	18%
12-c	Students understand, acquire and use English through their mother tongue	20	18%
12-d	Students feel that their mother tongue is vivid.	21	12.8%
9-a	I think using Arabic is less time-consuming.	22	10%

Table 2. Ranks of statements in Questionnaire '2'

Items	Statement	Ranks	Percentage
3	My English language teacher allows for using Arabic during lessons.	1	94%
9	Using bilingual dictionaries is helpful for me.	2	93%
2	I use Arabic during my English language lessons.	3	82%
5a	It is useful to use Arabic to explain grammar.	4	82%
5b	It is useful to use Arabic to define vocabulary.	5	82%
4	I prefer to use Arabic to communicate during English lessons.	6	73%
5e	It is useful to use Arabic to explain a content of a reading text.	7	55%
8	I think Arabic should be used in my English lessons.	8	51%
10	I think using translated books for grammar and vocabulary are useful	9	45%
5d	It is useful to use Arabic to check comprehension.	10	44%
5c	It is useful to use Arabic to give instructions.	11	38%

The researcher analyses and presents the results of the chi-square (x)² test with respect of the two null hypotheses of this study. The responses to items presenting significant differences among the participants at .05 level are discussed. The results of each (x)² test in each null hypothesis is tabulated and analysed. The following formula was used:

$(X)^2 = (O-E)^2 / E$ Where O is the observed cell value, E is the expected frequency of occurrence.

4.1 Null Hypothesis One

Table 3. Testing of the Null hypothesis 1

Item	Group	No	Positive	Negative	D.F*	Critical value	$\sum (x)^2$
8	teachers	43	17	26	1	3.84	1.88
	students	120	98	22			48.13
2	teachers	43	35	8	1	3.84	11.26
	students	120	98	22			48.13
3	teachers	43	22	21	1	3.84	0.02
	students	120	113	7			93.63
6a	teachers	43	23	20	1	3.84	0.021
5a	students	120	98	22			48.13
6b	teachers	43	26	17	1	3.84	0.53
5b	students	120	98	22			48.13
6c	teachers	43	11	32	1	3.84	13.30
5c	students	120	45	75			7.5
6d	teachers	43	18	25	1	3.84	2.57
5d	students	120	53	67			1.63
6e	teachers	43	16	27	1	3.84	2.81
5e	students	120	65	67			0.83

D.F= degree of freedom.*

Statement of the Null hypothesis: Arabic language as a mother tongue is not used and has no roles to play in learning English as a foreign language.

The above table reveals that the first hypothesis is rejected. Significant differences between students' and teachers' responses were found on the items below:

a) I think Arabic should be used in English lessons. Item 8 (students)

b) I use Arabic during my English language lessons. Item #2 (Teachers & students).

c) My teacher allows for Arabic usage during English lessons. Item # 3(students).

d) It is useful to use Arabic to explain grammar. Item #5a (Students).

e) It is useful to use Arabic to define vocabulary. Item #5b (Students).

f) It is useful to use Arabic to give instructions. Items 5c, 6c (Teachers & students).

Table 4. Testing of the Null hypothesis 2

Item	Group	No	Positive	Negative	D.F*	Critical value	$\sum (x)^2$
13	Teachers	43	37	6	1	3,84	22.35
9	Students	120	112	8			90.13
14	Teachers	43	26	17	1	3,84	1.88
10	Students	120	53	67			1.63
11	Teachers	43	27	16	1	3,84	3.93
9a	Teachers	43	4	39	1	3.84	28.49
9b	Teachers	43	16	27			2.81
9c	Teachers	43	11	32	1	3.84	10.26
9d	Teachers	43	12	31	1	3.84	8.40

D.F*= degree of freedom.

4.2 Null Hypothesis Two

Statement of the Null hypothesis:

Using of Arabic language in English language classrooms does not facilitate learning of English. It actually hinders it.

The above table reveals that the second hypothesis is rejected. Significant differences between students' and teachers' responses were found on the items below:

Using bilingual dictionaries is helpful. Item # 13 and # 9. (Students & teachers).

Using Arabic never hinders understanding of English. Item # 11. (Teachers).

I think using Arabic is less time-consuming. Item 9a(Teachers).

Using Arabic helps students feel confident. Item 9c(Teachers).

I think using Arabic raises students' participation. Item 9d (Teachers).

4.3 Arabic from Teachers' and Learners' Prospective

This paper aims to find out students' and teachers' view regarding using Arabic in English language classrooms in Saudi Arabic secondary schools. The study shows that there is discrepancy gap between the teachers' and the students' beliefs about using L1. Students seem happy with using their mother tongue and they think it is useful for explaining grammar and defining vocabulary. On the other hand, teachers deny the usage of Arabic. Although they use it. This may refer to the influence of using English only approach. As noticed from the results, both teachers and students agree upon the role of Arabic in giving instructions. This can be interpreted as willingness of the teachers to make sure that they are understood by the students due to their low level in English.

4.4 Using Arabic as a Facilitator

Close examination to the findings of the second hypothesis reveals that mother tongue does not hinder learning of a foreign language but facilitates it. Students can use bilingual dictionaries especially when they are studying on their own. No doubt this will give them self-confidence. Moreover, mother tongue can be considered as a time-saving tool.

As noticed from the results above. the findings from this study bear many similarities to those of Schweer's (1999), Burden's (2000) and Tang's (2002) Who claim that students and teachers have positive attitude toward using their mother tongue during English classes. They state that it facilitates their job by using bilingual dictionaries, saves their time, and gives confidence when participate. On the other hand, teachers have a bit conservative view and their denying of using mother tongue may refer to the dominance of English as an only approach. Moreover, Saudi Arabia did not have exposure to British colony and culture. So, they do not think English is very important. This may affect to what extent they assign their mother language as compared to a foreign one.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Although this study and the literature have shown clearly teachers' and learners' view towards using their mother tongue, further research is still needed. Of course the researcher does not encourage mother tongue overuse in learning foreign language , but as researchers we have to consider learners motives and goals, ideological and environmental factors and individual differences.

5.1 Recommendations

Finally, the following recommendations are pertinent to the conclusions reached by this study:

a- Students should not be forbidden from using their mother tongue if they see it is helpful for them to learn a foreign language.

b- Teachers should pay attention to their learner's mother tongue role in giving instructions, forming pair work, group work, explaining grammar and presenting new vocabulary.

c- Using Arabic language in some classroom activities may show the students that their mother tongue is vivid and parallel to the foreign language.

d- English teachers, supervisors and all who concern of methodology of teaching foreign languages should rethinking on the issue of banning mother tongue inside the classroom.

e- English language curriculum designers should devote a space for Arabic language e.g. translation exercises, bilingual dictionaries and other activities which can show similarities and differences between the two languages.

f- Welcoming students' language as expression of their own culture could be one way to dispelling negative attitudes toward English and increasing receptivity to learning the language.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for Teachers

A questionnaire on the use of Arabic language in the English classroom.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out more about attitudes towards L1 use in English language classroom and will be used for research purposes only. Please tick the relevant boxes blew:

1- Arabic should be used in an English classroom

a-strongly disagree   b-disagree   c-undecided   d-agree   e- strongly agree

2- I use Arabic language in English classroom.

a-never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e-always

3- I allow students to use Arabic during English lessons.

a-Never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e- always

4- If you agree with using Arabic, in which stage should be used by the teacher.

a- Never   b-Presentation stage   c-Practice stage   d-Production stage   e-In all stages.

5- If you agree with using Arabic, in which stage should be used by the student

a- Never   b-Presentation stage   c-Practice stage   d-Production stage   e-In all stages. 6-When do you think it is appropriate to use Arabic in an English classroom for these elements: -

	Never	rarely	sometimes	often	always

a-To explain grammar.

b- To define vocabulary.

c- To give instructions.

d- To check comprehension

e-To explain the content of a reading text

7-How often do you think Arabic should be used in an English classroom?

a-Never   b-rarely   c-Sometimes   d-often   e- always

8-How often do you actually use Arabic in your English classes?

a-Never   b-rarely   c-Sometimes   d-often   e- always

9- If you think there is a role for Arabic language in teaching English language, why do you think so?

a-It is less time-consuming

b-It aids students' comprehension

c-It helps students to feel confident

d-It raises students' participation

e-Others (please specify) …………………………………………………..

10-Arabic is widely used by teachers and students during English lessons, and that refers to: -

a-The importance of mother tongue in learning.

b-Teachers' and students previous learning experience.

c- Students' standard in English language.

d- The environment around the student.

e- Other. (please specify). …………………………………………………

11- Do you think using Arabic in an English classes hinders understanding and using of English inside the class?

a-Never   b-rarely   c-Sometimes   d-Often   e-Always

12- I think that using Arabic during English lessons makes: -

a- Students think in their mother tongue than in English

b- Students depend on their mother tongue for comprehension

c- Students understand, acquire and use English through their mother tongue

d- Students feel that their mother tongue is vivid

e- Others   (Please specify) ………………………………………………

13-I think using a bilingual dictionary (English –Arabic)is helpful for students.

a-Never   b-rarely   c-Sometimes   d-Often   e-Always

14- There are some English language books which explain vocabulary and grammar in Arabic language. What is your opinion about them?

a-strongly disagree   b-disagree   c-undecided   d-agree   e- strongly agree

15- Please add any comments on the use of Arabic language during English language lessons.

Appendix B

Students' Questionnaire

A questionnaire on the use of Arabic language in the English classroom.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out more about attitudes towards L1 use in English language classroom and will be used for research purposes only. Please tick the relevant boxes blew:

1- Arabic should be used in the English classroom.

a-strongly disagree   b-disagree   c-undecided   d-agree   e- strongly agree

2- I use Arabic language in English classroom.

a-never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e-always

3- My English teacher allows for using Arabic during lessons.

a-Never   b-rarely   c-Sometimes   d-often   e- always

4- I like my English language teacher to use Arabic in the classroom.

a-never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e-always

5- When do you think it is appropriate to use Arabic in an English classroom for these elements: -

<div align="center">always   Never   rarely   sometimes   often</div>

a-To explain grammar.

b- To define vocabulary.

c- To give instructions.

d- To check comprehension.

e-To explain the content of a reading text

6- How often do you think Arabic should be used in English classroom?

a-Never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e- always

7-How often do you actually use Arabic in your English classes?

a-Never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e- always

8- I think the use of Arabic in English language classroom helps me learn English.

a-Never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e- always

9-I think using a bilingual dictionary (English- Arabic) is helpful.

a-Never   b-rarely   c-sometimes   d-often   e-always

10- There are some English language books which explain vocabulary and grammar in Arabic language. Do you think they are useful?

a-strongly disagree   b-disagree   c-undecided   d-agree   e- strongly agree