NON-NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT USING TURKISH (L1) IN EFL CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY

Case Study

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Abstract

This study investigated 5 non-native English teachers' perceptions on Turkish (L1) use in English language (L2) classrooms in the English Preparatory School context of European University of Lefke in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The participants were interviewed by using a semi-structured interview and observed by administering a predetermined observation checklist. Gathered data were analyzed to explore the participants' beliefs and classroom practices regarding the necessity of using L1. The participant non-native English teachers' views regarding the reasons of using Turkish (L1) were also explored. The results of the study revealed that the teachers had neutral perceptions about benefiting from Turkish (L1) in their foreign language classes and underscored a place for Turkish (L1) in English (L2) classrooms. In other words, the majority of the participants did not reject Turkish use; however, due to some restrictions such as English medium education system in the teachers' workplace, nationality factors, and teachers' own teaching philosophy brought some different dimensions to this process. Overall, the majority of the teachers supported the use of Turkish whereas only one teacher had the opposite view emphasizing that students can become dependent on L1 help which has a high possibility of inhibiting learners from target language acquisition.

Keywords: Teachers' perceptions, L1 use, L2 maximization.

1.Introduction

The use of L1 has been one of the foremost controversies in English Language Teaching field. This concern divided the prominent educationalists and researchers into different parties. According to some of the educationalists such as Kellerman (1995), Krashen (1981) and Wechsler (1997), the success of teaching English can only be sustained by the monolingual approach by which teachers can provide opportunities for language learners enough target language exposure. There are, on the other hand, theorists who are in favor of the bilingual approach, which suggests the idea of L1 usage in EFL/ESL classes. Educationalists namely Cook (2001), Dedrinos (2006), Larsen-Freeman (2011) and Nation (2003), regard L1 as a fundamental tool for L2 learning. Both groups have counter-views, which promoted on-going arguments throughout the years. The research showed that the notion of using L1 has become the pivotal argument in this field.

1.1.Views Regarding Monolingual Approach

Phillipson (1992, p.73) emphasized that there are "the explicit and implicit values, beliefs, purposes, and activities which characterize the field of ELT and which contribute to the maintenance of English as a dominant language". As a result of this belief, it was proposed that English can be best taught monolingually. Phillipson (1992, p.185) stated that there are some false beliefs lying behind the language teaching field, which make significant contributions to English supremacy and explained the importance of the exclusion of L1 use from language classes as:

> *"English is best taught monolingually*
> *The ideal teacher of English is a native-like speaker*
> *The earlier English is taught, the better the results*
> *The more English is taught the better the results*
> *If other languages are used much standards of English will drop"*

Similarly, the concept called English only policy in which mother tongue is regarded as interference to learning a foreign language (Mouhanna, 2009). In order to debate on this issue, which was a dogma, "critical theory", and "Critical Applied Linguistic" were taken into consideration as a directive perspective (Pennycook, 2001, p.7). It was suggested by Dean, (1994, p.4) that "naturalized" assumptions cannot be drawn with our own conception of reality. Therefore, another essential principle of Critical Applied Linguistic (CAL) is on that the finder of fact suggests extravagant perspectives of varieties in fact by emphasizing that the "transformative mission of critical work or the potential for change through awareness and emancipation" (Pennycook, 2001, p.8). A counteractive view, which emphasized the deliberate use of L1, was emphasized by Cook (2007) noted as follows:

> *"One nation, one people, one language". The importance is highlighted even more by the fact that the students' culture is part of their language and by neglecting their language, the teacher, in a monolingual classroom, neglects their culture which leads to the danger of neglecting their identity as well. What is more, there is no valid database that could confirm the standpoint that the monolingual approach in teaching is the best one. The disregard of the students' mother tongue can, in fact, de-motivate the students and be counterproductive. Therefore, there is neither a scientific nor a pedagogic reason to exclude L1 from the teaching process." (Cook, 2007, online).*

Mouhanna, (2009) stated questioning the monolingual principle is to sustain a flipside and different perception that favors the use of L1 of students, which was regarded as a mean during the learning and teaching process rather than an intervening factor that should be dismissed from the language classes.

1.2. Views Regarding Bilingual Approach

More information on the factors that affect the preference of English teachers when using L1 usage would help to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter. Thus, it is necessary to understand why the L1 argument still remained worth questioning. There have been several investigations on to what extend L1 should be used and for what purposes it should be included in English teaching. Previous studies have shown that the way teachers talk is crucial in every kind of classes. The reason why a teacher talk is necessary is to convey the message. The techniques that teacher uses such as giving feedback, asking questions, providing explanations all have importance beyond any doubt. All these mentioned pedagogical strategies have an impact on the effective classroom management likewise target language acquisition of language learners (Nunan, 1995). Similarly, Kafes (2011) referring to Harbord, (1992), who advocated of mother tongue integration, suggested

its usage for several reasons; learning styles, a humanistic approach, and time management. Furthermore, Atkinson, (1987) elaborated on these reasons and he asserted that there could be more reasons on a language proficiency level basis. For instance, evoking language (all levels), comprehension check (all levels), for instructing (early levels), sustaining collaboration for learners, teaching and building up the language (mainly early levels). Moreover, Harmer, (2001), attributing to Harbord, (1992, p. 354), who indicated that the use of first language habit can occur in language classes inevitably among the groups of the students even though the teacher aims to use English frequently to expose students to the target language. In addition to this, another idea of how the use of mother tongue became an important technique in English language teaching was because of the fact that some of the language teachers have sentiment on the first language (L1) that it promotes the second language learning (Schweers, 1999). Furthermore, the effects of L1 usage is not the only instruction but also on the students who are directly involved in this process L1 in language classes. In this vein, Piasecka, (1988, pp. 98-99) exemplified the occasions of the usage on L1 which are: "negotiation of the syllabus and the lesson; record keeping; grammar, phonology, morphology and spelling; discussion of cross-cultural issues; instructions or prompts; explanations or errors; and assessment of comprehension". By evaluating its spread over the lesson, the above-mentioned occasions show how much the use of mother tongue is embedded or put into practice in a language class. Similarly, Deller and Rinvolucri, (2002) indicated the fact that the language learner's mother tongue should be put into practice only in certain situations as follows: *"*

- *Comparing English grammar with the mother tongue's grammar can be very positive for some learners.*
- *Beginners will probably progress at a quicker pace if the use of the mother tongue is allowed in the classroom.*
- *Translation exercises may also be the perfect practice when there is a grammar point that is causing trouble to students."*

Based on the already conducted studies, many reasons for using L1 have been classified. According to Atkinson, (1987) for early levels, L1 can be helpful to understand the complex instructions. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by Deller and Rinvolucri, (2002) and those described by Sweet, (1964) as suggested that initial point to start teaching a foreign language should be students' own language with its attributes.

These situations above brought up important questions such as: can mother tongue and the second language be used interchangeably? Or should a language teacher decrease the amount of the use of L1 and also should language teachers ignore the L1 and use L2 frequently to sustain enough language exposure for the language learners? The questions have been asked over time with different forms; therefore, there is a rich information pool of this subject in the relevant literature. This shows a degree of importance to be aware of mother tongue usage in a language class where it is supposed over the decades or else English should be the only language in some cases or at least English should be the primary means of communication and the instruction. These questions opened the ways of reanalysis of the existing teaching methods, which were once widely used and lost its effect because of the new language teaching trends were born or added to the existing ones as a result of the needs and the characteristics of students have changed over the periods.

When regarding today's language classrooms, as put emphasis on different factors prevailing the process of learning and teaching English, more specifically in Turkish contexts, some of the researchers are of the vital importance when regarding their studies. The underlying reasons of utilizing L1 in foreign language classrooms and English teachers'

beliefs on valuing L1 in Turkish context were taken under consideration by Salı, 2014; Özçelik, 2013; +Paker & Karaağaç, 2015; Timuçin & Baytar, 2015. Since these conducted studies are recent, it can be seen that there is still a paramount curiosity on L1 choice in L2 classrooms, which strengthens the value of its presence in the field of ELT. Common reasons were proposed in terms of the inclusion of L1 in a study conducted by Paker and Karaağaç, (2015) similar to the previous studies in the past decades. Overall, the results of their study indicated that L1 was used for making jokes, showing concern to the students, showing empathy, to explain difficult concepts or ideas, to talk about administrative information (course policies, announcements, deadlines, etc.), to explain grammar rules, and to talk about the exams. As a final note, Kaynardağ, (2016) attributed to some advantages and disadvantages of L1 usage when teaching English were listed from various studies carried out by Üstünel and Seedhouse, (2005), Cenoz, (2008), Sampson, (2012), Elridge, (1996), Carless, (2007) mentioned as follows:

1.3. Advantages of L1 Use

- *In order to save time when establishing a task, stating instructions in an understandable way especially in lower levels, teachers struggle with sustaining the requirements in a clear way for all learners. It is believed that L1 utilization can ease the process by saving time, (Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005).*

- *Cenoz (2007) asserted that including L1 can better metalinguistic awareness, particularly for complex grammatical sentences and vocabulary. Using L1 enable learners to make a connection between the existing language knowledge exists in their L1 system and in L2. As a consequence cognitive bridge becomes more strong.*

- *Preventing meaning loss and confusion occurs when teaching new words in the target language (English), students may need more support; therefore, they can reiterate to understand the meanings of words in their own languages. It is assumed that they make connections semantically, (Sampson, 2012).*

1.4. Disadvantages of L1 Use

- *Using L1 includes high possibility for learners to have it as a reference even when it is unnecessary. Thus, overuse of L1 may occur. The objective may not be met when considering the foreign language teaching and learning, (Kaynardağ, 2016).*

- *L2 exposure remains restricted when L1 is used aimlessly. When considering the target language learning settings in which L2 exposure may not be sustained all the time. Hence, students' chance of improving speaking skills in the target language decrease, (Elridge, 1996).*

- *In contrast, what is believed about students' motivation when L1 is neglected, maximizing L2 can also maximize students' motivation too. This creates a situation for learners in which they make sure that they can use their speaking skills by conveying the message. This directly gives students a sense of achievement in the target language, (Carless, 2007).*

All in all, some scholars such as Phillipson (1992), Schäffner (2002), Cook (2007), Ellis (2008), Zainuddin (2011), Özçelik (2013), Salı (2014), Paker & Karaağaç (2015), Timuçin & Baytar (2015) and many other mentioned researchers, who supported the Bilingual Approach, conducted studies to shed light on the idea that supports L1 usage in EFL classrooms by proposing different circumstances of mother tongue usage. These circumstances are such as saving time, clarifying ambiguous grammatical points, checking

for comprehension, supporting students' target language development in a positive way, and etc. On the other hand, Elridge (1996), Auerbach (1993), Pachler and Field (2001), Carless (2007) Krashen (1981), Kellerman (1995), Weschler (1997) and other prominent figures have contributed to the Monolingual Approach throughout the years by promoting reasons of why mother tongue should not be used during teaching foreign languages due to several reasons. Some of the major reasons of L1 exclusion from language classrooms are because of the fact that students' target language development may not be as expected, students may not be autonomous learners during target language learning, teachers code-switching may be demotivating for other foreign students in the classroom. Having said all the crucial assumptions of the prominent scholars with their reasons underlying when to use L1 or when not to use L1 can also be highlighting mark regarding language teachers' code-switching acts in EFL classes.

Although there have been numerous studies conducted on the L1 (mother tongue) use in L2 classrooms in the previous years until so far, there is still no definite answer of whether directly excluding L1 from EFL classrooms or not. Above mentioned groups of educationalists contributed to the L1 debate by bringing different dimensions and showed that the need for L1 usage likely to exist on some occasions in EFL classrooms. The current study particularly focuses on Cyprus Turkish Preparatory School context EFL classroom and teachers' perceptions about L1 usage by benefitting from code-switching from English to Turkish since the number of the studies on this issue is scarce.

2.Method

This study investigated the perceptions of the non-native teachers' about the usage of Turkish (L1) in foreign languages classes, in which English is both the Target Language (TL) and medium of the instruction in an English Preparatory School (EPS) of European University of Lefke (EUL), Northern Cyprus. Furthermore, it investigated the underlying reasons for English teachers using Turkish in their language classrooms, and the factors affecting teachers' code-switching, the pedagogical purposes of using Turkish when teaching English will be another emphasis. For this purpose the following research questions were designed:

1. What are the non-native English teachers' perceptions of the Turkish (L1) usage in EFL classrooms?
2. What are the reasons for non-native English teachers to use Turkish (L1) in EFL classrooms?

The participants of the study were 5 non-native female English teachers out of 21 English teachers selected purposively and voluntarily. Participants particularly were selected by considering their current levels; therefore, especially teachers who were teaching at different levels were chosen within the scope of the study. Since the female English teachers' number outweighed male English teachers' (i.e: there were only 2 male English teachers working), the gender role of teachers was not examined in the present study. The age of the teachers ranged from 25-35. However, their age characteristics and L1 usage relations were not the focus in this study. The instructors had various work experience (3-8 years) in English teaching at the EPS of EUL. 3 instructors out of 5 had 6-8 years and 2 out of 5 had 2-4 years of teaching experience. Furthermore, the educational background of the instructors differed from each other regarding BA, MA. 3 instructors out of 5 were MA graduates and 2 out of 5 were BA graduates. The classes they were teaching were of approximately 25-35 students and the learners were having 5 sessions of English course every day. They were teaching English at different levels (i.e., beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate).

This study was carried out by following qualitative means of investigation. A case study was employed. In this investigation, the data collection instruments were semi-structured interviews and observations. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately an hour for each participant and classroom observations were carried out by using a predetermined observation checklist. The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively.

4.Findings

Research Question 1: What are the non-native English teachers' perceptions about L1 usage in EFL classrooms?

Generally, the participants did not reject the need for using Turkish when it is really needed.   The participants said that Turkish is not allowed to be used in all cases; therefore, the majority of the participants mentioned some circumstances in which Turkish can be used. For instance, T1 expressed the need for using Turkish when teaching English as follows:

"Errr We really we need to use Turkish not in all the cases like if you use some keywords according to the purpose so it will be key for us to save the time and it will be very beneficial when teaching English. If you are stubborn to use English all the time, the students may not understand you and they may have a problem with some grammar points you need to carry on. At that point you may use some quick words that have equivalent in Turkish, it can save time and you can carry your lesson."

(Teacher 1)

Another participant had a similar view as Teacher 1 as follows:

"English should be used mostly. If we really want our students to acquire language, we shouldn't use Turkish to make them get used to the language."

(Teacher 5)

However, one participant rejected Turkish use directly by considering the strict English medium instruction policy in her workplace.   The participant mentioned:

"There is a policy to use English while teaching all the time. Therefore, in my lessons I do not prefer using Turkish during teaching English because I believe that if I use Turkish, the students will expect me to use Turkish all the time, so I never use any Turkish words."

(Teacher 2)

To sum up, even though there is a high awareness of institutional English medium instruction policy, teachers did not deny the fact that they feel the need for Turkish use time to time.

Research Question 2: What are the reasons for non-native English teachers to use L1 in EFL classrooms?

Some participant teachers put emphasis on the students' English proficiency level is the detrimental factor of teachers' L1 choice.   They pointed out this view as follows:

"Especially for the Beginner levels, I use Turkish because they don't understand anything. You need to use mother tongue more for the Beginner levels." "Yes, of course, there are variations between levels. Because pre-intermediate students can understand you better but Beginner and Elementary students don't understand you."

(Teacher 3)

"...if I have beginner level group I may tend to use Turkish but if I have intermediate level students I don't prefer to use Turkish to make the meaning clear."

(Teacher 4)

Some participant teachers emphasized using L1 for clarifying grammatical and lexical ambiguities as follows:

> *"As I said before like errr, if the students are having difficulty with a word which they don't understand, they checked it up, but they didn't really understand what the words mean and especially with the Beginner level and the Elementary level, it will be very useful if we use the Turkish equivalent word and then carry on... Umm, or as I said again like in a grammar point or in a vocabulary section if the students have difficulty and then whole class has a difficulty then stop the lesson and just one minute and give the Turkish instruction, Turkish equivalent and then carry on."*

(Teacher 1)

> *"I use Turkish to make instructions more clear and understandable. Also, I use it in order to make students see similarities between two languages. If students do not understand English translation of a word, I try to translate it to their own language to make it more memorable…"*

(Teacher 5)

The majority of the participants did not reject the uses of Turkish but their purposes were to use Turkish to sustain clear understandings especially when explaining abstract words and give instructions in Turkish for further guidance.

4.Discussion

Generally, most of the participants had mainly neutral attitude towards the L1 usage when teaching English; however, only one of the non-native teachers rejected its usage by believing L1 can inhibit the target language acquisition. The other participants did not totally reject Turkish usage; however, when it came to their classroom practices, mismatches have been seen especially for those teachers who did not reject using Turkish up to some extent, but they did not use it in their actual practice when teaching English. Only two non-native English teachers' interview responses and actual pedagogic styles matched in terms of Turkish usage when teaching English. The reasons underlying behind those who accepted the need of using Turkish, but could not use might have been due to multicultural learning context. The reasons for not using L1 in those teachers' classrooms could have been due to multicultural learning setting since foreign students were present in the classes. Teachers' language choice could have been depending on the students' profile, or classroom atmosphere. In contrast, the teachers who used L1 when they were observed had a chance to actuate L1 to some extent because there were no international students in their classes on the observation day.

Non-native English teachers used Turkish for several reasons. The majority of the participants accepted the fact that Turkish could be used to check comprehension, to clarify the meaning, to bring fun into the learning atmosphere, and etc... According to the interview and observation data, the findings have shown that teachers, who were especially teaching at Beginner and Elementary levels, preferred to use Turkish in order to help students when teaching complex grammar topics such as passive voice or reported speech. In a recent study that İyitoğlu (2016) conducted in Turkey revealed that teachers' code-switching reason resembled in terms of its use. It was found that teachers code-switched due to *"clarifying grammatical structures and vocabulary items"* (p.267). Furthermore, teachers who were teaching English to lower levels (Beginner-Elementary) tended to use Turkish for vocabulary to bring Turkish equivalence of ambiguous English words. Unlike teachers who supported Multilingual approach rather than solely applying the Monolingual approach in their classrooms, one teacher (T1) remained to be an advocate of Monolingual approach in her

English classroom. That participant has had a strong Monolingual approach belief although she was aware of the students' mother tongue need (Turkish in this case). She said that she never used Turkish even if students had difficulty in understanding any challenging grammar topics or any abstract words that might confuse students' mind. The participant tried to give more examples as much as she could. That teacher, who had a Monolingual way of teaching style, agreed with this idea because she believed that target language should be used as the only source of input, and she added that when an English teacher wanted to emphasize the importance of using or learning English s/he could use other teaching techniques such as flashcards, body language, miming and etc... in order to avoid using Turkish in the classroom. She added that she never used any Turkish word in her language classes. This was her principle. She has been teaching here for 8 years and she has never used any Turkish words during teaching.

When the reasons for non-native English teachers to use L1 (Turkish) in their classroom were taken into consideration, it can be said that the teacher who supported only Monolingual teaching philosophy in her classroom used Turkish only when the directorate required from her when announcing any important news. Unlike T1, the other non-native teachers used Turkish especially for lower level students who were at Beginner and Elementary proficiency levels. In this case, the students' current levels mattered in terms of teachers' code-switching between Turkish and English. Likewise, Bensen and Çavuşoğlu (2013) conducted a study in an English Preparatory School of a private university in North Cyprus referred to Tien and Liu (2006) who proposed that students with a low proficiency level of English regarded teachers' code-switching effective for better comprehension in EFL classes. Similarly, in this study, the majority of the participants put emphasis that students' language competence level could affect teachers' code-switching when teaching English. Majority of the participants emphasized that the lower levels such as Beginner and Elementary level students were more in need of translation and using their Mother Tongue (Turkish) to learn English better although some of the participant teachers observed there was no significant correlation between teachers' Turkish use and students' target language acquisition success. Most of the non-native teachers found Turkish practical especially when giving instructions, so they tried to simplify their language or they tried to translate the instructions into Turkish to be clearer for all learners.

5. Conclusion

Generally, the majority of the participants were highly aware of English medium instruction in their workplace. On the other hands, participants were also aware of the language learners' Psychological, Cognitive and Linguistic needs. All of the participants asserted that they do their best to increase the target language learning in EFL classes; however, the ways of doing this differ from each other for several reasons. Overall, the result of this study suggests that there are several disadvantages of using L1 proposed by the participants such as students becoming dependent on L1 help and a high possibility of inhibiting from target language acquisition. Although some drawbacks were identified by the participants, the advantages of L1 inclusion in EFL classes outweighed the disadvantages. The majority of the participants benefitted from code-switching in EFL classes due to several reasons such as clarifying grammatical rules and abstract words, managing time efficiently, giving clear instructions, establishing positive learning atmosphere, decreasing students' anxiety level and also following administrative requirements.

6. Implications

This study was conducted with an intention to guide specifically Non-native English teachers in terms of the necessity of Turkish they feel to use in their EFL classrooms.

Although the central focus was non-native English teachers especially working in a language school, the topic of the study applies to all educationalists around the world. The current study can guide institutions, educationalist, curriculum developers, decision-makers, teachers, and teacher-trainers in the future. In other words, this study may also contribute to the policymakers to find opportunities to make necessary changes regarding the current education system. This study should not be regarded as the guideline for only stakeholders, but also it can be seen as a reference for teachers to evaluate their teaching practices and beliefs.

7.Limitations

This study has some limitations. It was conducted with a limited number of participants so the findings of it cannot be generalized to a larger population. Moreover, it is limited in terms of combining students' perceptions with teachers' perception of L1 in L2 since only the teachers were the participants. Also, observing the participant teachers more than once would yield richer data.

8. Implications for Further Research

Further research can be conducted by extending the criteria such as gender difference, work experiences, students' perceptions which would affect English teachers' language preference.

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