



EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF USING ARABIC LANGUAGE IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO LIBYAN MIDDLE STAGE STUDENTS AT SEBHA CITY

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(EFL) English as a foreign language
(L1) First language
(FLT) Foreign Language Teaching
(TL) Target Language

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exploring the effect of using Arabic language for teaching English as a Foreign Language in a Libyan context at middle school stage in Sebha city. English language teachers in Sebha middle schools usually rely on using Arabic language more than English language in their classes, but they come across a problem which is the lack of communication between the teachers and their students in the target language due to students' difficulties in communicating in English. The current study sample consists of 10 participants. The researchers used random sampling to select the participants of the study from three middle schools in the city of Sebha. The researchers used an interview technique to elicit data from the participants. The findings of the research indicated that using (L1) Arabic language in English classes affects Libyan middle school students' effective mastery of L2 in a negative way when learning English as a foreign language within a classroom setting in a Libyan context. This paper recommends further research to be conducted to explore relevant types of problems related to this study with different areas.

استكشاف أثر استخدام اللغة العربية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لطلاب المرحلة المتوسطة الليبيين في مدينة سهبا

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الكلمات المفتاحية:

(EFL) اللغة الأنجلو-أمريكية
(L1) اللغة الأم
(TL) اللغة المستهدفة
(FLT) تدريس اللغات الأجنبية

الملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى استكشاف تأثير استخدام اللغة العربية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في سياق مرحلة الدراسة المتوسطة بمدينة سهبا بليبيا. يعتمد معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية في مدارس سهبا المتوسطة عادةً على استخدام اللغة العربية أكثر من اللغة الإنجليزية في فصولهم الدراسية، لكنهم يواجهون مشكلة تمثل في نقص التواصل بين المعلمين وطلابهم باللغة المستهدفة بسبب صعوبات الطلاب في التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية. تتكون عينة الدراسة الحالية من 10 مشاركين. استخدم الباحثون طريقة أخذ العينات العشوائية لاختيار المشاركين في الدراسة من ثلاثة مدارس متوسطة في مدينة سهبا. استخدم الباحثون أسلوب المقابلة لاستنبط البيانات من المشاركين. أشارت نتائج البحث إلى أن استخدام اللغة العربية كأداة تسهيل في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية يؤثر سلباً على طلاب المدارس المتوسطة الليبيين عند تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية داخل بيئة الفصل الدراسي. توصي هذه الورقة بإجراء المزيد من الأبحاث لاستكشاف أنواع المشكلات ذات الصلة بهذه الدراسة في مجالات مختلفة.

1. Introduction

Using the mother tongue to teach EFL students was and still a subject of argument. Many instructors of English language think that the best way to teach a foreign language is by using the mother tongue of the students as a facilitator tool for teaching L2. English language, without a doubt, is considered to be the first worldly used language, even in countries which do not use English as their first language. (Warschauer & Zohry, 2002) claim that the use of the target language inside the class room is more helpful than the use of (L1) in the way that it helps learners to acquire the target language successfully and helps the

students in the process of L2 learning. This is not supported by other researchers as Brown (2000) who suggests that starting the class with the students' first language provides a sense of security and validates the learner's academic experiences, allowing them to express themselves.

2. Statement of the Problem

Teachers of English as a foreign language in Libya rely on the use of the mother tongue to teach English. Libyan teachers find it so hard to depend on the target language (English language) only when teaching

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middle school students. It is because of the fact that those Libyan students do not really understand English language perfectly. L2 Teachers find it complex to teach English without the use of the students' first language. They also claim that their students come upon many problems understanding English as a foreign language without the use of the mother tongue by their teachers in a classroom setting (Tang, 2002). There have been many researchers conducted in the field of first language use in English classrooms by numerous researchers and language teachers. Majority of this research has investigated teachers' or students' beliefs and attitudes regarding the use of the first language in the classroom. In contrast, there have been only few studies exploring the effect of using L1 in Libyan context. This study is going to fill in the gap of previous studies regarding the use of Arabic language in a middle school in Sebha city. Accordingly, this paper aims at exploring the way that the use of (L1) has an effect while teaching English as a foreign language to Libyan middle stage students in the school of Sebha city in Libya.

3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer one main question:

What is the effect of using Arabic language on teaching English as a foreign language at a middle school stage in Sebha city?

4. Research hypothesis

This study hypothesise that Arabic is dominating the English class which hinders effective mastery of the language.

5. Aim of study

This study aims at exploring the effect of using Arabic language in teaching English as a foreign language at a middle school stage in Sebha.

6. Literature Review

The issue of teaching or learning a new language by the help of learners' native language has raised conflicting ideas by many educators and researchers. Some believe that the use of L1 can be really helpful in learning a new language; others argue that it hinders the learning process. Researchers who support the use of the students' first language justify it by claiming that L1 helps and bridges a path in learning any new language. On the contrary, others argue that L1 prevents students from learning new languages.

Deller and Rinvoluci (2002) are against the use of students' native language. They advise the language teachers of the unhelpful results of using the native language more than the use of target language in the classroom. On the other hand, a positive input to English learning can be accomplished through teaching English bilingually based on the condition of using L1 at appropriate times and for appropriate reasons as claimed by (Nation, 1978) & (Tang, 2002).

Miles (2004) indicates that limited use of the native language can actually facilitate the learning of an L2, and does not delay learning it. Hadley (2001) also claims that the role of students' first language is crucial while teaching English as a foreign language.

The suggestion of using L1 a classroom setting can be very valuable as claimed by researchers such as Swain and Lapkin (2000). It is justified by the appropriate use of L1 in teaching EFL and by focusing on avoiding the overuse which can make learners feel that they cannot comprehend the input of the foreign language until it is translated into their native language as argued by Macaro (2000).

Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) Approaches of Translation

Approaches of translation that can be used in teaching are: the communicative approach and the semantic approach. Newmark (1986:39) claims that "the communicative approach addresses itself solely to the second language reader, who does not predict difficulties, and would expect a generous transfer of foreign elements into his culture in addition to his language where required." However, the translator has to value and work on the form of the mother language text as it is the single material source for his work. He also adds "semantic approach remains within the original culture and assists the readers only in its connotations if they constitute the essential human (non-ethnic) message of the text."

Although both semantic and communicative translation complies with the usually accepted syntactic equivalents for the two languages in question, There is one major difference between these two approaches as suggested by (Hause, 1977): the communicative approach emphasizes the meaning rather than the content of the message which is more effective and less informative. In other words, the communicative approach is likely to be smoother, simpler, clearer,

more direct, more conventional, conforming to a particular register of language, tending to under-translate.

In contrast, the semantic approach is likely to be more complex, more detailed, more concentrated, and pursues the thought-processes rather than the intention of the transmitter. (Hause, 1977) adds that the semantic approach tends to be more specific than the original, to include more meanings in its search for one distinction of meaning.

Concerns of Using Arabic in the English Classroom

Three concerns can be identified when using Arabic language in the English classroom.

The first concern is that it is the student most used strategy when learning L2 as he prefers to translate without even a motivation from the teacher. This is supported by Deller & Rinvoluci, (2002) argue that the use of translation strategy is something that occurs naturally in an EFL classroom. Such strategy must be considered seriously by EFL instructors and should be substituted as possible by an equivalent English strategy.

The second concern is the humanistic approach. This approach permits using students' native language to express their needs. This can be reasonable point and none can refuse to help for example: "What is.....in English?"

The third concern is the transfer of Arabic strategies in explaining EFL lessons. This is certainly the reason most commonly specified by teachers who support the use of L1 in teaching a foreign language.

Using L1 in the English Classroom

In spite of the fact that some educators and teachers of EFL are completely not in favour of using of L1 in an English classroom, others believe in the role of L1 as a facilitator in the second or the foreign language classroom (Cook, 2001).

There are many arguments about the use of L1 in an English classroom. One argument is that the use of L1 creates interference between it and the target language in lexis use, structure and context. Such kind of interference does not allow learners to think in English and misdirects them to a conclusion in which both languages' expressions correspond to each other.

The fact that the use of L1 is unnatural process for L2 learners and completely differs from learning the four skills in English in terms of which language competence can be defined, namely: reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Many researchers and theorists of foreign language teaching (FLT) reject using L1 strategies to learn English. These researchers claim that communication in the classroom should take place as much as possible in English while others suggest that using L1 strategies may help in developing English as a communicative tool.

"The excessive use of L1 can create a feeling within the learners in which no word can be understood without translation" Alsaedi, (2012). Students cannot figure out the differences between equivalence of both languages in terms of form, and semantic, in addition to the pragmatic features. Such dependency on L1 makes learners oversimplify to the point of using inaccurate translation while they speak to the teacher in Arabic even when they are capable of expressing what they mean in English. Students fail to realize that during classroom activities it is essential to use English. On the other hand, Arabic use achieves advantages in areas as time-saving as claimed by Salah, (2012) and Machaal, (2012) or improving teacher- student relationship at the expense of causing the above problem (Turgut & İrgin, 2009).

The use of the first language as a method of learning and teaching a foreign one has arisen since the emergence of the direct method. The development of ELT as a profession for those who teach or as a way of communicating for those who travel abroad encouraged teachers to make a virtue of the necessity of using only English in the classroom. In addition to that, the subsequent growth of a English-based teacher training movement as a result of the need to provide training for teachers working with multilingual classes helped to reinforce the strategy of mother tongue avoidance. The effect of this movement on non-native speakers who make up the huge majority of language teachers has been to make them feel either defensive or guilty at their incapability to 'match-up' to native speakers in terms of directing a class totally in English. Studies in the field of the first language use in foreign and second language classrooms indicated that little and cautious use of the L1 in the English classrooms can abridge the process of teaching and learning. Teachers must employ first language

carefully and cautiously and this should be planned very well to gain positive outcomes (Cook, 2001).

The fact that some teachers prefer to change their classes to be an all English classroom but they come to find themselves ineffectively supplied with their mother tongue strategies. Unfortunately, they find themselves unable to continue based on the fact that their students cannot comprehend and may dislike this new method, so they revert to use of the mother tongue. These teachers view L1 as a helpful and useful method in teaching and learning English language. Moreover, the learners have frequently set a leaning to use the first language as a learning tool to achieve their goals in comprehending, remembering and learning L2 whether their teachers discourage them or not (Afzal, 2013).

In a study that was conducted in Jordon to investigate the effect of Arabic language in teaching English to Jordanian students, Rababah (2003) emphasized the importance of using the first language in English language teaching. He demonstrates this claim to professionally characterize the status of EFL learners' situation in Jordan. He argues that teachers in Jordan choose to use L1 to teach difficult words and to clarify English literature. Vocabulary items are still taught separately, neglecting the fact that the Communicative Language Teaching approach asserts the importance of teaching vocabulary items in a context. The findings of Rababah study pointed out that using the first language in the classroom setting is very beneficial in a Jordanian setting.

In another study that was conducted by Al Alawi (2008) to investigate teachers beliefs towards the use of L1 on their behaviour, using a mixed method of both interviews and observational. Al Alawi samples consisted of five English language teachers who teach different grades from 5 to 10. While observing the classes, Al Alawi found that L1 use inside the classroom was dominant when instructing students whereas it is not that much used when teachers manage their classes. The interview data collected by him, on the other hand, showed that the method varies between teachers. Some teachers were strongly against the idea of using L1 as it delayed L2 learning; others prefer to use it 'wisely', in situations where it is needed without depending on it all the time to teach L2. He also adds that according to sample responses, using L1 can give a chance the teachers and students to change the atmosphere of the class, for example, being humour in class from time to time, and that is a good strategy to break the ice between teachers and students and this can also strengthen the bond between the teachers and the learners inside the classroom.

Some researchers argue that the use of L1 could save time, especially when they come across difficult words, and it can also create a peaceful situations for learners to learn the target language.

Hayes, (2010) investigated the adequacy of students' preparation in English. He concluded that students unavoidably and even 'automatically' try to associate English language structures or lexical item with the closest or the most common related one in their first language. He adds by claiming that such association takes a place regardless of whether or not the teacher recommends or allows translation. Hayes proposes that the methodologies in investigating this phenomenon should work with this natural tendency rather than against it. In another study about the use of Arabic Language in English classrooms in Saudi Arabia, Damra & Al Qudah (2012) argue that teachers' methods of teaching English failed to motivate the students as they concluded in their study. They found out that the teacher's dependency on using Arabic language in class activities was rather clear and more than actually needed. The researchers recommend that teacher training colleges in Saudi Arabia have to improve their programmes for graduating English language teachers regarding the over use of L1 inside the classroom.

Elmangoush, (2023) conducted a study to investigate the attitudes of EFL Libyan teachers towards the use of Arabic in their English classrooms in Libya. The finding of the study showed that the use of Arabic language has positively affected Libyan learners. Likewise, Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) claim that the first language can provide students with an intellectual backing that make them able to discover language and produce a high-quality work. Copland and Neokleous's (2011) conducted a study about the use of L1 in a foreign language classroom, and they concluded that using L1 as a tool saves teachers' time, and decreases the amount of stress amongst students. On a contrary side, (Malmkjer: 1998) argues that L1 takes up valuable

time which could be used to teach L2 language four skills without referring to the first language.

Al-Ahaydib (1986) conducted a study to figure out the strengths and weaknesses of the English syllabuses of the intermediate and the secondary stages through the perception of supervisors, teachers and the third grade intermediate and secondary students. The study questioned students', teachers' and supervisors' interests, needs and complaints. Al-Ahaydib argued that the students' involvement in EFL classroom activities was very little due to the dominance of the teachers' talk time within the class. He also added In addition to that there was an emphasis on teaching grammar explicitly and in details associated with translation of all the rules in Arabic while teachers tended to speak Arabic more than needed in the classes.

The findings of the previously mentioned studies show that:

- 1- Teachers and students use L1 regularly in the English class.
- 2- Students prefer to use Arabic whenever they ask questions or take initiative.
- 3- Teachers tend to use Arabic often when explaining grammar rules, giving instructions, assigning activities and administrating classrooms.
- 4- Teachers use L1 to save time, and decrease the amount of stress amongst students.

Most of the findings of previous studies support the research hypothesis in which Arabic is dominating the English class which handicaps effective mastery of English language in the middle school grades at Sebha city.

7. Methodology

A qualitative method was used collect the data of this study in order to highlight the problem. An interview was conducted with 10 teachers to elicit data from the targeted English language teachers. The sample of the study was selected randomly from 3 middle schools in Sebha city. This study explored the effect of using (L1) Arabic language while teaching a target language (English Language) in Sebha middle schools. This study concentrated on the teachers' use of the mother tongue as well as the students' use of the mother tongue during the English classes. The main concern here was to explore the ways Arabic language use influenced English language learners inside the classroom and how English language was affected either positively or negatively by the learner mother tongue. The interview consisted of 5 open ended items. All the interviews were recorded after getting approval from the participants then the researchers transcribed the interviews verbally. The interview items are as follows:

- 1- Do you use Arabic Language in your class while teaching? If yes, why? And if no, why?
- 2- In what of situations do you use your first language in class?
- 3- What tasks make you in need to speak your first language in class?
- 4- Do your students respond and participate well in the class when you use your first language while explaining? Why?
- 5- Do you prefer to teach your students in Arabic or English language? How important is that?

8. Finding and discussion

The aim of this research is to explore the use of Arabic language in teaching English language. The participants of this study were 10 teachers. The data was collected by using one main tool which is semi-interview. The goal of using such tool was to understand the effect of using Arabic language in teaching EFL class. The qualitative data of the semi-interview was recorded and then analysed verbally. The results of this study indicated that the use of Arabic language by Libyan teachers was extremely clear in their English classrooms. Their main justification of using Arabic in their English classrooms as claimed by the teachers was that Arabic language helps students to understand the grammar rules and the meaning of new words and expressions in short time and easy manner compared to using EFL. It is also concluded from the findings that Libyan teachers seek to use Arabic language to correct their students' errors both in speaking and writing skills. The teachers justified their extreme use of Arabic in their English classrooms by stating that they are enforced to do that for many reasons. These reasons are as follows:

- Helping their students to learn the target language

All of the participants believed that using Arabic language in their classrooms is helpful for their students to understand the grammar rules of English. They also think that using Arabic helped their students to comprehend the text and understand the meaning of the new words. Moreover, the teachers also believed that using Arabic assisted their students dealing with exercises and activities provided in the classroom.

- Weak level of students in English

The results also signified that one of the main reasons mentioned by all of the teachers is that their students' level of English is weak. The teachers explained that most of their students find difficulties in grammar, and they do not have adequate store of vocabulary which can enable them to communicate with their teachers and each other in English. Thus teachers resort to use Arabic which helps students to increase their comprehension of the English grammatical rules and their understanding of the meaning of English words.

- Short time specified for English classes

Eight teachers stated that they use Arabic in their classrooms as it would help them to save time. They stated that the time allotted to an English class is 45 minutes which is a short time for English class. They believed that if they explained their lessons completely in English, they would spend longer time until their students understand. Thus they choose to use Arabic language to save time.

9. Summary:

The use of the Arabic language in teaching the English language can lead to several results and educational effects, including:

- 1- Using L1 may facilitate understanding as the use Arabic language helps in the explanation and understanding English grammar and vocabulary. On the other hand, Learners need to learn how to think in English and the use of L1 discourages them from doing so.
- 2- Using L1 may encourage participation in an English class. The use of Arabic language can encourage students to actively participate in the class and increase the level of interaction using their mother tongue. This can lead to a false belief that there is a word-for word equivalence between languages. The center of attention should be on learning the four main skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.
- 3- Using L1 may enforce students' confidence. Students may feel comfortable and confident when they are able to express themselves in Arabic. But this will deprive learners from learning the target language.
- 4- Using L1 much of the time in the class can delay learning the target language, especially if sufficient focus is not placed on developing their skills in the second language. Relying on the mother tongue may make it easier for students but this will instead interrupt developing their English language skills, which negatively affects their progress in learning the second language.

Therefore, a balance must be struck between using the Arabic language as a supportive and motivational tool and promoting the use of English language as a basic mean of achieving students' linguistic and cultural learning goals.

10. Conclusion

This study aimed at answering the research question: What is the effect of using Arabic language on teaching English language to Libyan EFL students at middle school stage in Sebha?

It can be concluded that using Arabic as a medium of instruction for teaching English as a foreign language at the middle school stage in Sebha, Libya, can have several effects: 1. facilitating understanding: Since Arabic is the students' first language, it can help in explaining English concepts, instructions, and grammar rules more clearly. This can reduce confusion and enhance comprehension. 2. Cultural relevance: teaching English through Arabic can incorporate cultural references and contexts familiar to the students, making the learning experience more relatable and engaging. 3. Building confidence: Initially using Arabic can build confidence among students, especially in speaking and understanding English. 4. Linguistic interference: there's a risk of interference from Arabic in terms of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage in English. Students might struggle to switch between the two languages seamlessly. 5. Long-term English proficiency: depending on how and when the transition to English only

instruction occurs, students may take longer to achieve fluency in English compared to those taught predominantly in English from the beginning. 6. Teacher competence: The effectiveness of using Arabic also depends on teachers' proficiency in both Arabic and English. Teachers need to be skilled in managing bilingual instruction effectively.

In conclusion, while using Arabic initially for teaching English can have advantages in terms of comprehension and cultural relevance, careful planning is essential to manage potential linguistic interference and ensure effective long-term English language proficiency among Libyan students.

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