



Graduation Project

First Draft

The Influence of Using the Mother Tongue on the English Learning of EFL Kindergarten Students in Riyadh

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of incorporating the mother tongue (Arabic as L1) in the classroom instructions and its impact on the English learning of EFL Kindergarten students in Riyadh. The study takes place at one of the kindergartens in Riyadh from which the researcher selects 20 Native Arabic-Speaking kindergarten students. This study is a two-group research design so the students are divided into two groups a control and an experimental group. The students of the control group learn their lessons using strict English-only instructions, while the students in the experimental group learn their lessons in a classroom that incorporates the mother tongue (Arabic in this context) with the classroom instruction. The duration of the study is one month after which the students will get a post-test to evaluate the impact of the program. The subject at hand is controversial and debatable, so expecting precise results can be problematic. Yet, I expect that the students' results in the experimental group will outperform that of the control group. In other words, the use of mother tongue in the classroom can improve EFL English acquisition.

Introduction

Finding the best method of teaching EFL has been the interest of linguists and language scholars for decades. There is no one ultimate method that can fit all EFL learners, so every teacher should find the method that best suits his or her students' needs. One of the earliest methods in teaching is using translation; when classes were small, and the students were homogeneous, translation was the most prevailing method. However, that changed with the emergence of the communicative approach. The supporters of the communicative approach argue that in order for EFL students to master their second language, they should be exposed to the target language input as much as possible.

The communicative approach started to dominate the English teaching around the 1970s ("Communicative language teaching", 2018). Since then, the

implementation of first language in the classroom has been neglected or even banned in some school or institutions. Nevertheless, that didn't stop EFL students or teachers from using their first language in the classroom. Using first language in the classroom differs from a teacher to another. Some teachers rely heavily on translation making the mother tongue the main language of communication in the classroom. Using the first language excessively in this way may yield negative impacts on the students and might even hinder their L2 acquisition. However, using the first language in moderation or only when needed (especially with young EFL learners), may maximize their learning benefits and facilitate their language acquisition. One of studies that encourages the implementation of a moderate use of translation in the classroom is Burden (as cited in Miles, 2004) argues that the strict use of second language in the classroom instead of a moderate incorporation of first language, might have a negative impact on the students. Explaining a grammar rule in the first language or translating a vocabulary might actually help the students to have a better understanding. Nonetheless, it is notable that the application of L1 in the classroom can only be possible if the teacher speaks the mother tongue of the students and that all the students in the class share the same first language. Undeniably, the mother tongue can influence the learning of a second language either positively or negatively. In this study, I will explore the effect incorporating the mother tongue (Arabic as first language) in the classroom instructions and its impact on the language acquisition of EFL young learners.

Literature Review

There is a lot of extensive research that has already been done to investigate the influence of using the mother tongue in the class and its impact on second language acquisition. The results varied between positive and negative. According to Bhela (1999), students will not master the second language as long as the method of translation is used in the classroom. This and many others are among the studies that reject the use of first language in the classroom asserting its negative impact on L2 acquisition.

Nonetheless, not all studies are against the use of the first language in the classroom. Harmer, (2001) argues that code-switching and the use of the first language can promote second language learning. He further asserts that ensuring a strict English-only class is very hard to implement because no matter what the teacher say or do, the students will use their mother tongue to communicate. In other words, using the mother tongue in the classroom can improve and facilitate the acquisition of L2 and even if L1 is banned in the classroom the students will use their first language in communication. According to Karimian & Talebinejad (2013), the implementation of first language or translation has significant impact on the acquisition of English as a second language. They further claim that students use their first language as an approach to facilitate their L2 learning. As for the implementation of first language in the classroom, Kasmer, (1999) argues that the use of translation in the classroom must be applied because it will help take advantage of the natural capability of the students to integrate the information of their second language through their first language processing. After reviewing the literature, it is apparent that there is no one conclusive result about the use of first language in the classroom. Hence, this study will try to investigate the efficacy of incorporating the mother tongue in the classroom instructions and its impact on young EFL learners.

Significance of Research

The efficacy of the translation method or the use of first language in the classroom has been debatable for decades. In this study, I am examining the effectiveness of integrating the first language in the classroom instructions and its role in developing English learning for kindergarten students. Using translation or the first language in the classroom is very controversial, so this study can help identify the benefits and drawback of using L1 in the classroom. If the results of this study showed a positive impact on the language skills of EFL Kindergarten students, educators may consider incorporating L1 in their instructional repertoire.

Research Question

What is the influence of integrating the mother tongue (Arabic) within the classroom instructions on the language acquisition of EFL kindergarten students?

Research Methodology

This study is trying to identify the influence of using the mother tongue in the classroom and its impact on the English acquisition of EFL kindergarten students. In this study, I am going use a two-group design. I will randomly select 20 students from a kindergarten in Riyadh city to represent the population of my experiment. Since all the participants are early learners there will be no need for a preliminary test as all of them will be considered as beginners. The instruments that I am going to use in this study include: an observation list, a treatment, a post-test and a questionnaire. The duration of the study is going to be one month.

Methodology

Before the beginning of the semester, I will visit the chosen kindergarten to meet with the principle and to present my study. After acquiring the permissions I will select 20 Arabic native-speaking students who will later be divided into two groups. The first group is going to be a control group that will receive no treatment and will learn in a strict English-only class. The second group will be the experimental group in which the teacher will incorporate the first language (Arabic) in her instructions. Throughout the duration of the study, I am going to monitor and record the improvement of the participants using an observation list. By the end of the program, I will test the students using a simple English test to calculate the results and measure the impact of the program. There will also be questionnaire in which I investigate with three teachers the impact and effectiveness of the applied treatment on the overall English skills of the ten students compared to the other students excluded from the study

Ethical considerations

The researcher will get the permission from the kindergarten management before starting the experiment. The international research guidelines instruct that in all the studies that contain human samples, the researcher must acquire consent from all the participants. Hence, all the permissions and the approvals will be attained from the principle of the kindergarten and the parents of the students. The children will not be forced into this study. The participants will remain anonymous and the results of the tests will be used for research purposes only.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study is time restraints. The duration of this research is only one month, and this might not be sufficient to produce accurate and reliable results. It is known that generalizing an outcome requires large samples and different criteria of students. Nevertheless, this study will be executed with 20 students for one month so, the results could be narrow. Finally, most kindergartens follow a strict English-only classroom method, so convincing the management of a kindergarten with my study can be problematic.

Expected Results

This study aims at investigating the impact of using the mother tongue (Arabic) in the classroom and its impact on the language skills of EFL Kindergarten students. The subject under investigation is very controversial so expecting a conclusive result can be challenging. Nonetheless, I expect my results to be aligned with that of Karimian & Talebinejad (2013). Hence I anticipate the following:

- 1- The moderate use of the first language in the classroom will motivate the students to speak confidently ensuring an engaging environment.
- 2- The moderate use of the first language in the classroom will help the students understand all the instructions which can facilitate their learning process.
- 3- The strict English-only instruction can create a threatening environment, especially, for early learners.

- 4- The moderate use of the mother tongue in the classroom can improve the overall English skills of the students.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Do you teach your students in an English-only classroom?
2. Do you think that English-only classes are intimidating for young learners?
3. Do you think that Arabic influences the English acquisition of your students?
4. Do you think that the use of mother tongue in the classroom can hinder their language acquisition?
5. Do you think that the use of the first language can facilitate the acquisition of English language?
6. Are you with or against the use of translation method in the classroom?
7. Do you think that the use of the first language in the classroom can make the students confident speakers?