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Original Research

Effects of Students' Beliefs about and Practices in L1 Use on Their Oral English Growth

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Abstract

The researchers in this descriptive case study set out to find out how students' beliefs and practises in their L1 affected their development of spoken English skills. The data was collected from 480 randomly selected pupils using a questionnaire and 12 classroom observations. Counts, records, and percentages were generated from the observation data, which included L1 and TL word utterances. The information gathered from the surveys was collated, counted, and then transformed into percentages and frequencies. Students' positive attitudes of using TL more frequently than L1 were revealed by the results. However, it was observed that the pupils used more L1 than TL words. Positive and negative effects of over-reliance on L1 in EFL classrooms were demonstrated by the results. In order to improve their oral English, students must not only have a positive mindset about the importance of employing the TL over the L1, but they must also put their thoughts into action.

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INTRODUCTION

Using L1 in EFL classes has been a subject of much discussion over its impact on FL learning. Altun (2021) clarifies three theoretical views amid all the discussions and disagreements that have undoubtedly added to the theoretical and methodological sophistication of research on L1 use in EFL courses. The first is the "virtual position," in which L1 usage is completely forbidden and the students' environment in the classroom is modeled after that of the target nation, with all communications taking place in the (TL). The second viewpoint is the maximum perspective, which accords L1 no pedagogical

value. The last viewpoint, according to Altun, is the best one, where L1 has some pedagogical value and its use enhances L2 learning in certain circumstances. Altun contends that L1 use in L2/EFL classrooms should not be undervalued but that excessive L1 use should be avoided in EFL classrooms. The similar view is held by Harmer (2007), who claims that excessive L1 use limits students' exposure to TL. The current researcher conducted informal observations of the neighborhood elementary schools as part of his community service fieldwork in order to investigate this pervasive issue. He found

that the pupils showed no interest in their usage of the TL per se or in trying to enhance their oral English. Instead, they quite frequently stick to using L1, even to the point where it appears to be an L1 classroom, which, according to the researcher, could lower the students' TL proficiency.

There have been a few connected studies on the subject, to the best of the researcher's knowledge. For instance, Jemal (2012) investigated the attitudes of students and teachers toward and goals of L1 use in college-level English classes. He neglected to take into account how excessive L1 use would affect students' oral English skills. Tamiru (2013) conducted study on how English was used by both students and teachers in subject area classes. His research was comparable to the current one, but it was distinct for three reasons: He did not investigate students' beliefs about the use of TL, and he did not observe the impact of excessive L1 use on students' spoken English practices, but this one did. Therefore, the following inquiries will be addressed in order to close the indicated gap.

The Research Questions

1. What are grade eight students' beliefs about L1 use in EFL classes?
2. What are students' practices for using L1 in EFL classes?
3. What are the effects of overuse of L1 on students' TL oral practices?

Students' beliefs about L1 use in EFL classrooms

Studies that examined how students behaved in language classrooms produced significant conclusions. For instance, in his attitudinal

study, Bateman (2008) focused on students' perceptions of TL and L1 use and looked at what they thought happened in the FL classroom in terms of the volume of TL and L1 use. He came to the conclusion that someone who really believes that engaging in the conduct will result in positively valued results will do so with a positive attitude. Contrarily, a person who firmly believes that their actions will lead to unfavorable outcomes will have a pessimistic outlook (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008). In addition, Brown (1988) affirmed that students' beliefs about the (TL) as well as their cognitive or linguistic abilities have an impact on their capacity to learn a second language. The researcher also argued that the attitude notion could improve language learning by affecting how students behave and what they believe about the other language, its culture, and its community. This would help researchers evaluate whether a student is likely to pick up the TL.

Students' English Oral Practices in Classrooms

Students must interact with the TL and be convinced that speaking it will meet their communication needs if they are to learn it. According to Altun (2021), oral practises in the TL help students improve their speaking abilities, and learners can only become proficient in speaking if they often utilise the TL. By performing speaking activities in the target language, students will learn more and improve their speaking skills. The researcher argues that FL requires continual practise because repetition is one of the strategies FL practitioners frequently employ.

Effects of Excessive Use of L1 in EFL Classes

L1 elements, including oral abilities, are essential for students to learn L2. L1 can be a valuable resource for acquiring and teaching L2 speaking abilities. It allows students to provide feedback, facilitate group communication, find necessary words and expressions, and create instructional materials for both languages (Pan & Pan, 2010). L1 helps learners make quick progress by reducing psychological obstacles to learning English. Switching to a native language helps maintain self-confidence and independence. Jones emphasizes the importance of speaking one's mother tongue in building identity. Incorporating L1 helps recognize past knowledge and identify individuals (Jones, 2010).

Others believe that L1 is "worrying" and more harmful than helpful (Brooks-Lewis, 2014; Mart 2013). Thus, as seen in the direct ways of teaching languages, efforts have been made to avoid using the L1 at all costs in language sessions through mime, gesticulation, drawings, etc. (Harmer, 2007). Both L1 and L2 can contribute to the learning context, so using both should be a priority, especially when the learning setting is an EFL environment, according to some academics (e.g., Nurpahmi, 2018).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this research, following Yin (2014), an exploratory study was employed to investigate the linkages that are too complicated for a survey or experiment. To this effect, a hybrid of observation and questionnaire data was utilized to investigate

students' L1 beliefs and practices and how these affected the development of students' oral English.

Selection of Sites and Participants

The research sites were chosen deliberately based on the researcher's informal observations of some primary school students using L1 excessively in English classes. The choice of grade 8 was made since it is the year when participants switch from their L1 to English-medium instruction. Thus, it was believed that this was the best area to look into how students' L1 beliefs and practises influence the growth of their TL. According to Kothari (2004), it is possible to take 20–30% of participants from a population greater than 1,000. The researcher, therefore, selected 30 eighth grade students from two sections of eight schools out of the total population of 1,920 eighth grade students in two zones.

Instruments of Data Collection

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was chosen because it is a popular and practical tool for gathering survey data since it offers organized, frequently numerical, information. According to Mackey and Gass (2005), people prefer to use a questionnaire because it is self-administered and, as a result, anonymity is guaranteed. At the same time, it can be administered to a large number of subjects at once. It was therefore thought that students might express their sentiments more freely and simply using a questionnaire than when they are interviewed to answer the identical questions.

Observation

The data acquired through observation was used as the main data source because it approaches reality directly in its physical structure and studies events as they evolve. It also enables researchers to see people's actions directly rather than depending on what they claim to accomplish (Lee, 2006). As a result, each of the eight primary schools that were chosen was observed three times. However, the first observation of each class was not recorded because it was used to familiarise the researcher with the participants so that any alteration of behaviour might be minimised during the two recording sessions of each class. Therefore, 16 observations were recorded.

Methods of Data Analysis

The students' beliefs about and practices in L1 were elicited through a questionnaire. Four hundred 480 students were given a 5-point Likert-scale-type questionnaire with 14 items. The questionnaire data were tallied, tabulated, and converted into frequency and percentages while the observational data were transcribed, coded, numbered, and recorded as L1 and TL utterances and then turned into frequency and percentages for the final analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In accordance with the sequence of the study questions, the analyses of the findings were provided. The data pertaining to student beliefs about L1 use in EFL classes was first provided. Second, the English and L1

practises of students in EFL classrooms were examined. Last but not least, attention was given to how the usage of L1 in EFL lessons affected students' oral English development.

Students' Beliefs about the Use of L1 in EFL Classes

Seven questionnaire items were developed to examine students' opinions on the use of L1 in EFL lessons (RQ1). The replies were compiled in Table 1, and each item was interpreted accordingly. In Table 1, the first question required respondents to share their beliefs on whether optimal English use improves students' oral practises. Accordingly, 411 (85.6%) believed more classroom use leads to better spoken English, while 69 (14.4%) disagreed.

In the same table, Item 2, 136 (28.3%) respondents believed that only English should be used for class tasks, while 20 (4.2%) could not decide. Three hundred twenty-four (67.5%) believed that L1 should be used in EFL classrooms. However, a significant portion, 390 (81.3%), explained that students should be encouraged to speak in English, whereas 90 (18.7%) of them disagreed. In Table 1, Items 4 and 5, the respondents were required to explain whether L1 should be utilised in EFL classrooms or not. Accordingly, 380 (79.2%) stated that L1 should be used in EFL lessons. Only 90 (18.7%) agreed that they never utilise L1 in EFL sessions, while 10 (2.1%) could not decide. Similarly, in Table 1, Item 5, 320 (66.7%) respondents agreed that they liked the occasional use of L1 in EFL sessions while 160 (33.3%) did not.

Table 1

Students' Beliefs about Use of L1 in English classrooms (N=480)

No	Item	A		U		D		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	The more students use English in EFL classes, the more their oral English will improve	411	85.6	-	-	69	14.4	480	100
2	Only English should be used when working on a task in the classroom	136	28.3	20	4.2	324	67.5	480	100
3	Teachers who remind their students to speak English in class are appreciable	390	81.3	-	-	90	18.7	480	100
4	I do not believe in using my L1 in EFL classes	90	18.7	10	2.1	380	79.2	480	100
5	I like the occasional use of L1 in EFL classes	160	33.3	-	-	320	66.7	480	100
6	I regularly use my L1 in the classroom	320	66.7	-	-	160	33.3	480	100
7	I always speak English because I believe that it improves my oral practices	226	47.1	-	-	254	52.9	480	100

Key: A= Agree; U= Undecided; D= Disagree

This suggests that the 320 (66.7%) use L1 on a frequent basis (see also Item 6). In Item 7, the respondents were questioned about whether they always speak English because it improves their speaking techniques. Two hundred twenty-six (47.1%) stated they speak English exclusively because they believe it improves their spoken English. Even though they believe it makes them communicate more effectively, 254 (52.9%) honestly admitted that they don't always use English in EFL lessons.

Students' Practices of L1 in EFL Classes

The researchers developed a 10-category classroom observation checklist and checked off each participating student's statements

during the 16 observations to answer the second research question. After that, they tallied the responses for each category. To make it simple for readers to see the distinctions, they counted the utterances and then organised the categories in descending order depending on the number of utterances in each category, as summarised in Table 2. In Table 2, student participants made 985 utterances, of which 753 (76.5%) were L1 and 232 (23.5%) were English. When they answered and asked questions, asked for permission, and self-corrected, the students used 174/232 (75% of the total English utterances in the 10 categories) and 424/753 (56.3%) of their L1 utterances in the first four categories.

Table 2

Students' Practices of L1 in EFL classes

N	Students use L1/English to:	Afan Oromo (L1)		English (TL)		Total utterances	
		*F	%	*F	%	*F	%
1	answer	99	10.1	82	8.3	181	18.4
2	ask	101	10.3	60	6.1	161	16.4
3	get permission	129	13.1	-	-	129	13.1
4	self-correct	95	9.6	32	3.3	127	12.9
5	repeat teachers' L2	95	9.6	17	1.7	112	11.3
6	translate	86	8.7	-	-	86	8.7
7	tell problems to Teachers	49	5	17	1.7	66	6.7
8	talk to friends	49	5	14	1.4	63	6.4
9	give suggestions	29	3.0	10	1	39	4
10	avoid waste of time	21	2.1	-	-	21	2.1
	Total utterances	753	76.5	232	23.5	985	100

**F- Represents frequency of utterances*

Repeating instructors' L2 utterances, translating to L1, telling teachers about issues, talking to friends, offering advice, and not wasting time made up the remaining six categories, which accounted for 329/753 or 43.7% of all L1 utterances across all 10 categories. The first four categories accounted for 598/985 (60.7%) of the total English utterances in the 10 categories, leaving 387/985 (39.3%) for the remaining six categories. Thus, the student participants produced more than half of the utterances in the first four categories, or 58/232 (25%) of the total. Table 2 makes it clear that student participants used more L1 utterances in the 10 categories than they did in the same categories when they used English utterances.

Effects of L1 Use on English Oral Practices

The researcher created seven items, summarised them in Tables 3 and 4 correspondingly, and administered them to

480 students to determine both the positive and negative consequences of L1 use.

In the eighth question, respondents were asked to comment on whether or not the teacher's explanation of abstract concepts in L1 sped up the process (Table 3). Three hundred sixty-two (75.4%) respondents said that they were able to save time by employing L1. However, 13 (23.5%) felt that it is not faster to describe abstract concepts in L1. Five (1.1%) remained silent. The ninth query examined the possibility of lowering anxiety in EFL classes by employing L1. In contrast to 136 (28.3%) respondents, who disagreed, 354 (71.7%) claimed that employing L1 in EFL classes greatly reduces students' anxiety in the lesson. The final question in the table asked whether or not students actively participate when using their first language and 345 (71.8%) stated that when students use their L1, they actively participate in class.

Table 3

The Positive Effects of Use of L1 in EFL Classes (N=480)

NO.	Items	A		U		D		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	L1 should be used in EFL classes because it:								
8	saves time when the teacher explains	362	75.4	5	1.1	113	23.5	480	100
9	reduces anxiety	344	71.7	-	-	136	28.3	480	100
10	students participate more actively	345	71.8	17	3.6	118	24.6	480	100
11	facilitates students' English learning	283	59	42	8.7	155	32.3	480	100

Key: A= Agree; U= Undecided; D= Disagree

One hundred eighteen of them (24.6%) argued that it did not encourage students to participate actively. The remaining 17 (3.6%) students could not decide. Item 11 of the same table shows that 283 (59%) students agreed that

using their L1 helped them learn English, whereas 155 (32.3%) said that using their first language never helped them learn English. However, 42 (8.7%) of them found it difficult to decide.

Table 4

Negative Effects of Overuse of L1 in EFL Classes as Perceived by Students (N=480)

No	Items	A		U		D		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	Excessive use of A/ Oromo in EFL classes:								
12	reduces students' exposure to English	380	79.2	-	-	100	20.8	480	100
13	makes students more dependent on A/ O	368	76.7	-	-	112	23.3	480	100
14	hinders students' English learning	359	74.7	-	-	121	25.3	480	100

Key: A= Agree; U= Undecided; D= Disagree

Table 4 summarises the negative effects of employing L1 in EFL sessions. To this end, three options were presented. The 12th item asked the participants to say whether or not their exposure to English was diminished by the usage of L1. Three hundred eighty (79.2%) students responded saying that using L1 excessively reduces exposure to English. The remaining 100 respondents (20.8%) contended that overusing L1 did not reduce students' exposure to English. In the same Table, Item 13, 368 respondents (76.7%) stated that using L1 excessively increases

students' dependence on it, while 112 respondents (or 23.3%) countered that L1 use does not increase students' dependence on L1. A similar argument was made by 359 respondents (74.7%; see Table 4's Item 14), who said that using too much L1 in EFL classrooms seriously impedes students' ability to learn English. However, 121 (25.3%) of them asserted that it had no impact on how well students perform in oral English.

Discussion

The majority of students believe that using the first language (L1) in English classes is

beneficial and difficult to avoid, as it simplifies learning the target language (TL). However, Altun (2021) argues that regular interaction with the target language is crucial for developing communicative competence. The study also found that students used more L1 utterances than English utterances, which is contrary to second-language theories' claims of facilitative effects. L1 can help students learn English more quickly, reduce anxiety, and encourage active participation, but it should be used with caution. Overuse of L1 can severely impair students' ability to learn English by decreasing exposure and increasing reliance on it. This is in line with Filiberto (2015), who argues that excessive L1 use in foreign language instruction decreases conversational proficiency in the target language and fails to understand the value of the second language. Overall, the use of L1 in EFL learning is unquestionably beneficial if used appropriately, but overuse of the first language should be avoided as it restricts students' exposure to the target language.

CONCLUSIONS

The researcher believes that using L1 is inevitable, especially in primary schools, but can jeopardize the TL's supremacy if used systematically, selectively, and injudiciously. Students must integrate their views with real practices, using the TL with minimal L1 use, and understanding its relevance to their practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examines students' beliefs and practices of L1 and English, focusing on oral English improvement. It recommends

focusing on TL use, considering its global value, students should be cautious in using L1 in TL oral practices.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest was reported

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENTS

The data of this study are available from the author upon request.

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