



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Switching Codes at Elementary Level: An Interview Based Study of English Language Teachers**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Both monolingual and bilingual methods exist for L1 usage in teaching and studying English as a second/foreign language. The purpose of the study is to observe the views of elementary schools' English teachers about the use of the national language (in our context 'Urdu') in English class. Additionally, the researchers discover which circumstances triggered the teachers to abandon the English language and use Urdu. This research was completed at the Government elementary schools of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, with the teachers of English teaching at the elementary level. The study is descriptive. The data has been collected by conducting structured interviews. The data has been transcribed and analysed by arranging it into thematic categories. The data was collected from 14 teachers, both male and female. The results showed that participants had a neutral outlook on using their first language (L1) in helping them accomplish their second language learning. Based on the current understanding of how language learners acquire a second/foreign language and new findings, it is reasonable to conclude that learners' native language plays an indispensable and helpful role in learning a foreign language under certain circumstances.

**Introduction**

Many people believe that learning English is crucial, especially for those who desire to advance in their careers or pursue a higher degree. For this reason, some countries worldwide have adopted the English language as the primary source of their educational materials and the language of instruction in their curriculum to address the problem. There has been some debate about the commonly held beliefs that English is best taught through a range of channels and it is feasible to converse

in English without using a second language (L1), which can be traced back to the early twentieth century. Times have changed, though. A growing academic agreement is forming around the belief that English only policies may be unattainable in many instances, and educational institutions may also reject these policies. The question of using the native language in English class has always been challenging to answer. Considerable research is conducted on the benefits of using native language in teaching a second/foreign language (Shahzad et al. 2019)

Prodromou (2002) concluded that learners at the beginner level had more inclinations toward the usage of their native language than learners at the advanced level. A total of three hundred Greek pupils, including beginners, intermediates, and advanced learners, participated in the survey, which he performed. The study results revealed that utilising L1 was more acceptable and accepted among beginners. Still, students at the intermediate and advanced levels were more interested in interacting in English language, according to the findings.

Dujmovic (2007) surveyed his hundred EFL students to learn more about their opinions. Finally, he found that his respondents were interested in using L1 in L2 settings, and he concluded that this enthusiasm was apparent in their response. According to Harmer (2002), students tend to revert to their native language when the nature of the assignment is not congruent with their language proficiency. As it is natural for them, the students will most likely utilise L1 for communication. Still, the instructor will not place communication-related tasks that would naturally benefit students who primarily use L2. L1 has assisted in L2 abilities so that its usage is a helpful support for L2 learning. Schweers (1999) examined how L1 is used in his monolingual Spanish-speaking courses in Puerto Rico. He discovered that classroom usage of L1 was advantageous. In a classroom setting, the L1 is employed to clarify challenging ideas, make the atmosphere more comfortable, test understanding, provide vocabulary definition, and re-orient those who have become lost in their subject. He advised teachers to use the language local to their learners and stated that it helps students begin with their L1 and express themselves.

In reality, studies demonstrate that moving from one language to another is an automatic and unconscious process for all language learners. Furthermore, the L1 is a very significant resource in L2 learning (Cook, 2001; Woodall, 2002). In other words, instructors should foster students' inherent propensity to be creative, rather than attempting to suppress it. Furthermore, Goldstein (2003) showed that when students could not use their L1 in private areas and received sanctions for speaking their mother tongue, they felt ashamed and did not utilise their language.

Using one's mother tongue in the L2 classroom has also been the subject of several recent empirical studies (Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002; Kavaliauskiene, 2009; Kovacic&Kirinic, 2011; Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz, 2011; Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Timor, 2012; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014), all of which have demonstrated that it is beneficial (Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002; Ka For example, in response to Cook's thesis, Turnbull (2001) argued that the teacher's usage of the mother language is detrimental to L2 learners' ability to communicate. The comprehensible output

hypothesis, introduced by Swain (1985), contends that students learning a second language (L2) require more activation of their language to succeed in the classroom and that the L2 might aid in this activation. The second language (L2) should be used frequently in classrooms, as a result, to guarantee that learners receive sufficient exposure to the language in a variety of contexts and situations (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). A plus is that numerous studies have demonstrated the critical relevance of immersing learners in their second language rather than their native language when learning a second language. An increasing number of recent papers and reviews (e.g., Turnbull & Arnett (2002a), Nation (2003b), Scott & de la Fuente (2008), Littlewood & Yu (2009a), and others) suggest that learners of a second language should be exposed to the L2 to reap the most significant benefit from their studies of the second language.

### **Material and Methods**

The data for this study was collected with the help of a structured interview. The item list for structured-interview has been adapted from Anton and DiCamilla (1998). The items given in the discussion were the basis of the thematic categories developed later for data analysis. The interviews were conducted through Zoom and face to face interaction. The data were transcribed and analysed. There were 14 elementary school teachers, both male and female, selected randomly for the data collection. They were all teachers of English from Government schools in the Bahawalpur district.

### **Results and Discussion**

As mentioned earlier, the structured interviews were conducted with the respondents individually, and the recordings were transcribed and discussed under the significant thematic categories addressed with them. In this section, the discussion is given based on those thematic categories.

### **Grammar Translation Method vs Direct Method**

The first and foremost was the choice of a teaching method for teaching English at elementary level. In response to proponents who favour the Grammar Translation Technique (GTM) in lieu of the direct method, a new position on this topic has evolved because of discontent with the previous one and in favour of the newer approach, the method utilising the mother tongue as a tool for L2 learning (Brown, 2000). It allows instructors and students to get beyond the need to understand the literal meaning of specific issue phrases in many contexts and different languages (Esmail, 2015). Using L1 in class again has have an effect on how teachers use English as a second language in the classroom. The argument of preferring one over the other is long established debate. But, many of the respondents in the present study stated that it would be far better if GTM was adopted as a method at elementary level. One of the teachers said:

*"Since the students at this level do not have much exposure to the English language, it is better to teach them through GTM. Teaching only in English language can not produce desirable results especially from the students of Government schools. The majority of the students belong to the middle-class families and they do not expose to the English language at home."*

Another teacher stated:

*"Using direct method in the class is just like wasting time. Students need to be made understood not just made them hear whatever is being said by the teachers. The students simply cannot be taught through direct method at elementary level."*

### ***Using L1 Eliminates Anxiety***

The second notion which was approved by the majority of the respondents was the role of L1 in eliminating the language learning anxiety of the students. The respondents said that using Urdu while teaching in the class has always proven helpful in decreasing the fear of learning English in the classroom. The students felt themselves encouraged and reinvigorated for learning English. One of the teachers said:

*"It is quite evident that students feel more relaxed and confident when Urdu is used in the classroom. They always show a forwarding and progressive attitude when we use Urdu in while teaching them."*

Another added:

*"Urdu is our national language and most of the students speak Urdu at home and among themselves, so they are more relaxed when it is used in the classroom. They confidently learn their language and ambiguities and conflicts in understanding the concepts become less frequent."*

Still another commented:

*"Once I decided to use direct method in my English class. I felt that my students are getting nervous and confusion was visible on their faces. It took me quite a lot of time to get them back to class and to their normal state."*

Nation (2003) and Mayer (2008) concluded the same and narrated that using L1 can minimise the language learning anxiety and using only English in the classroom could make the students reluctant of speaking it especially when they are nervous to use a new language. Another important factor behind the use of L1 is that it cuts down on translation time. There are numerous academics that say the practise of using foreign language translations is more effective than explaining and expanding on the meaning of particular terms to aid learners.

## Comprehension and Vocabulary Learning

The third theme was about comprehension and vocabulary learning. A large majority of the teachers favoured the notion that using Urdu in the English class had proven helpful in understanding the subject matter and vocabulary learning. There are some of the arguments of the three teachers for this construct:

*"Urdu helps the students understand whatever has been taught in the class. Using Urdu to make students comprehend whatever I teach them, has always helped both of us in understanding and vocabulary learning."*

*"How can they learn vocabulary and the use of vocabulary if they cannot understand the meaning of a word? Its crystal clear that they have been given the concept in the language they understand the most. If I read them a passage and do not tell what it means, the learning and teaching will be wasted."*

*"Learning something without concept is not at all learning, what I believe in. we use Urdu to make them get the concept and to make them understand the meaning of the vocabulary items."*

In this way, Urdu translation is considered the best alternative to traditional methods of teaching languages. The L1 system has been used in schools across the for more than a decade and is now being trialled in the by the Department of Education.

## Motivating Force for Autonomous Learning

Using native language is another skill, like listening, speaking, reading, and writing, that should be acquired along with the four aforementioned skills (Raza & Ali, 2020). In order to aid comprehension and communication, it should be used in schools. According to Ross (2000), using translation in the classroom helps to improve L2 learning and promote independent learning, as stated by Mahmoud (2009) and Shahzad et al. (2021).

One of the respondents said:

*"It is an establishing fact that if they are able to understand what is being taught they will feel themselves motivated for self-learning. Understanding and easy methods of teaching will help them taking the charge of their own learning."*

Another added:

*"...in Pakistani classroom it is very hard to impart a kid of education where all of the students are given individual attention. We have to move through groups of students. The use of Urdu language not only made us ourselves sure that students have comprehended the lesson but also help them promoting independent learning."*

### **Using Urdu is less Time-consuming**

The respondents reported that each lecture in the school is of forty-five minutes and in one class they are supposed to complete the whole teaching process they have designed for the class. It would have been very crucial to complete the whole lesson if the time is consumed over making students teaching in English language. Using Urdu during teaching English is less time-consuming. One of the respondents shared:

*"An English teacher has to spend forty-five minutes in the class to teach them a lesson. If we don't use Urdu language for comprehension of the ideas and concepts we cannot complete the lessons and overall, the whole curriculum. Using Urdu saves the time of the teachers and in my own view, it is very important to complete the course in time instead of teaching them through English only".*

Another supported in these words:

*"I have been teaching for the last ten years at elementary level and not even a single time I am given a fulsome response from the students if I use English only to teach them. Students like those teachers who help them get the concepts at this level and in the state-run schools it is indispensable to use Urdu because of the background of the students."*

### **Urdu Explains the Abstract Concepts**

Abstract concepts are difficult to be taught in English. Same is in the case of complicated sentences and new vocabulary items. Without using Urdu, as reported by teachers, they cannot be taught successfully and effectively. One of the teachers recorded:

*"Honestly speaking, I was not taught in English medium institutions and I can understand that while teaching I am also in the learning process. I used to translate the complex sentences in Urdu for myself and I think the same is suitable for the students too."*

The overall expressions of the respondents were in favour of using Urdu to explain and present complex ideas, give instructions, and introduce new topics in the classroom.

### **Students' Active Participation in Classroom Activities**

Cognitive and linguistic development of the students can only be demonstrated through their active participation in the activities being conducted and organised in the classroom. Urdu is reported to play a fortifying force for the students at elementary level for the participation in the classroom activities. The teachers reported that classroom instructions for the organising the activities can best be given and understood in the Urdu language. One of the teachers said:

*"an activity is the demonstration of what is acquired and learnt. Students can demonstrate the learnt material only when they are properly instructed and directed. This can only be done with the help of Urdu. Students understand and follow the instruction more accurately when they are instructed in using Urdu language."*

### **Challenges of Using English as only language in English classroom**

Although a lot has been advocated in using Urdu in the English classroom, the young elementary teachers also stressed addressing the challenges they face in using English as the only language in the classroom. Over all they suggested the following:

- English teachers should be given trainings in pedagogical skills and they should be made proficient in speaking English language.
- The syllabus should include the contents that focus on the communicative needs and competence of the students
- The language labs should be established in the schools where the listening tutorials would be made available to enhance listening skills.
- A standard translation guide should be provided to the teacher to translate the subject matter in Urdu.

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that the use of Urdu in English classrooms is crucial and necessary in Pakistan. The use of Urdu is encouraged and practised in state-run schools, with teachers advocating its use. The teachers believe that using Urdu language may help students understand their lessons better on the one hand, and that it may also help teachers manage the time allotted for their lessons on the other hand. When students are taught with translation or when concepts are explained in the Urdu language, they are more likely to be motivated and zealous about self-learning. Numerous findings from previous research have been validated and replicated by this study, which concluded that using a student's native language, or L1, improves the learning process for that student.

The teachers have reported that using Urdu helps students overcome their fear of learning a foreign language and actively encourages them to participate in the learning process actively. They perform significantly better in their classroom activities and appear to be more motivated and energetic as a result. Further researches may also be conducted at secondary or advanced level English teachers to explore why it is necessary to use Urdu in English classroom or otherwise.

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