



Received: 02-02-2023
Accepted: 11-03-2023

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Teachers' Views on Including Translation-Related Exercises in L2 Reading Classes

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Abstract

The teaching of English as foreign language in governmental schools in Morocco has witnessed the introduction of English as a subject in middle schools. Up till now, young learners aged between 13- and 15-years old take English classes for the first time. This category of learners is likely to face difficulties in English classes given that the curriculum in Morocco bans the use of L1 and imposes the sole use of L2 in EFL teaching. Additionally, teachers of English, either in pre- or in-service trainings, are urged to avoid use of students' mother tongue out of respect for the pedagogical guidelines specific to the teaching of English in Morocco. However, English teachers, especially those working in middle schools, may not agree with the idea of banning L1 use in their classes with beginners

despite doing their best to follow the ministerial guidelines. The present paper aimed at investigating middle school teachers' attitudes towards using translation exercises in reading comprehension classes with beginners. To accomplish this, despite the very strict lockdown conditions which were imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, 10 Moroccan teachers who teach English in public middle schools were interviewed. Results, generally, revealed that teachers in middle schools are open to the idea of incorporating students L1 in the form of translation exercises in their classes. Data analysis also indicated that teachers are positive towards including translation in reading comprehension classes believing that it is a strategy which could contribute to enhancing foreign language learning.

Keywords: EFL, Beginners, Translation Exercises, Middle School, Reading Comprehension

1. Introduction

The use of L1 in EFL classes has always been in the heart of debating. Between opponents and proponents, many points of arguing continue to exist. Hence, the heated controversy of defending the introduction of students' mother language or banning it in L2 contexts has always brought about opposing views.

At the same time, such controversy shows that this topic is worth researching. From a general point of view, this research sheds light on the use of students' mother tongue in the form of translation. After being marginalized and later banned in EFL classes research in recent decades has shown that L1 can still have a room in foreign language methodology. Consequently, scholars called for the reconsideration of L1 underlining the fact that it can play a facilitative role in foreign language classes and believing that depriving students from using their L1 to think and link it with their L2 existing knowledge is impossible (Lenoardi, 2011 ^[1] and Cook, 2007 ^[2]). In the literature, much theorizing has been done on L1 use in EFL contexts, whereas focus in this paper is placed on teachers of English in middle schools simply because this specific category of English teachers are regarded as essential contributors to the success of teaching and learning processes in zero beginner levels. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to come up with innovation as regards the role of L1 in foreign language teaching in a method which is totally different from widely criticized grammar translation method.

2. Materials and Methods

To conduct this research, Moroccan teachers of English who work in the same area, teach the same level of beginners and use the same textbook were interviewed. As a matter of fact, covid-19 pandemic constituted a big challenge since a lockdown was imposed. Fortunately, with the improvement of the pandemic conditions in-person interviews with the teachers were cautiously. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis method and were discussed in the light of findings of previous research done in the same line of research.

3. Results and Discussion

In general, the results of this research showed that teachers of English in middle schools hold a positive view towards the idea of using translation in foreign language classrooms even though these teachers are officially expected to avoid it in respect for

the guidelines of foreign language teaching enforced in Morocco. This is clearly inferred from the three themes which resulted from thematic analysis according to which translation exercises were regarded as a welcomed teaching strategy, a recommended reading comprehension technique and a source of facilitation. Teachers are accordingly in favour of including translation exercises in reading comprehension classes of beginners.

This research has led to interesting findings and conclusions about the topic under investigation which are in line with findings of the previous studies. In this sense, teachers' welcoming attitude finds support in the previous studies provided that translation exercises have been suggested as a strategy which can promote the teaching of reading comprehension (Upton, 1997) ^[3] because L2 learners normally resort to translation as a strategy which helps them understand the reading material.

More support for teachers' perception can be found in Kern's (2005) ^[4] research findings. The researcher concluded that translation is often used as tool of facilitation by students to comprehend texts in L2, especially the use of mental translation when they face difficulty in understanding unfamiliar words, expressions or structures (Kern, 2005) ^[4]. It was also found that translation exercises are recommended by teachers for beginners. In the same context, Popovic (2009) ^[5] asserts that translation activities may provide guided practice for learners. Suggesting L1 based exercises in L2 reading classes as revealed in this paper is in line with the fact that translation is seen as a pedagogical tool which can be a valuable teaching aid to integrate the four traditional skills (Popovic, 2009) ^[9].

4. Conclusion

From a specific research angle, findings about teachers' attitudes towards investing translation exercises in reading comprehension classes were interesting in that these activities have been welcomed. It was remarkably revealed that such way of including L1 in L2 reading classes could assist beginners in building and enhancing their understanding of texts. However, like any other research this paper has shown common limitations of context and participants. Despite these, the present research could be regarded as a promising starting point for future research which can experiment and suggest innovative ways of reintroducing students' first language in foreign language classes anew and differently from the grammar translation method.

5. Recommendations

In the light of the results of this research, pedagogical implications about the teaching of English as a foreign language in Moroccan middle schools can be addressed to foreign language policy makers and English teachers. For the former, findings imply that the L2 approach adopted and enforced by the ministry of education in Morocco could be reconsidered, especially in middle schools. For The latter, teachers, could consider including/experiencing students' L1 in the form of translation-based exercises in reading comprehension classes.

6. References

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