

“THE USE OF LEARNERS’ OWN LANGUAGE (L1) IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (ELT)”

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Annotation

This extension project critically examines the evolving role of learners’ own language (L1) in English language teaching (ELT). Once discouraged in favor of immersive monolingual methods, L1 use is now increasingly recognized as a pedagogical resource. Drawing on key sources—Hall (2018), Moore (2013), and Liu & Xu (2018)—the paper explores how strategic, context-sensitive use of L1 can enhance comprehension, reduce anxiety, support classroom interaction, and promote learner inclusion. Moore’s concept of emergent L1 use and the notion of translanguaging highlight how flexible language practices can create more authentic and equitable learning environments. The author reflects on a personal shift in perspective and outlines practical classroom applications, such as brief L1 use for clarification and scaffolding. The paper concludes that responsible L1 integration supports bilingual learners’ needs while maintaining English as the main medium of instruction.

Key Words: English Language Teaching (ELT), First Language (L1), Translanguaging, Bilingualism, Classroom Interaction, Pedagogical Strategies, Comprehension Support, Learner Inclusion, Code-Switching, Teacher Beliefs, Target Language Exposure, Monolingual Ideology, Language Policy, Strategic L1 Use, Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Introduction

Within the field of English language teaching (ELT), the use of learners’ own language (L1) in the classroom has been a longstanding area of debate and evolving research. For many years, monolingual approaches dominated, with a strong emphasis on maximizing target language exposure and minimizing L1 use. However, recent scholarship suggests that strategic own-language use can be an effective pedagogical tool rather than a barrier. This extension project explores key findings from recent academic sources to deepen my understanding of how L1 use can support learning in the ELT classroom and how I can apply this knowledge in my own teaching context.

Key Perspectives on Own-Language Use

Hall (2018) provides a comprehensive overview of how attitudes toward own-language use have shifted over time. Historically, methods like the Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching prioritized immersion and discouraged any L1 use, based on the belief

that this would speed up target language acquisition. However, Hall argues that such an approach overlooks the complex, bilingual reality of most learners and ignores the cognitive and sociocultural benefits of drawing on the L1 as a resource. He emphasizes that, when used judiciously, the L1 can aid comprehension, scaffold new content, and promote learner confidence.

Moore (2013) further develops this perspective by proposing an emergent view of L1 use in foreign language classrooms. He argues that L1 use should not be seen as simply allowed or prohibited, but rather as something that emerges naturally through interaction as learners and teachers negotiate meaning. His study highlights how students and teachers fluidly shift between languages to clarify concepts, give instructions, and manage classroom dynamics. This emergent approach challenges rigid language boundaries and supports more authentic, meaningful communication.

Liu and Xu (2018) examine classroom interaction and highlight that strategic own-language use can foster more inclusive and supportive interaction patterns. For example, brief L1 explanations can reduce learner anxiety, especially for beginners or students with lower confidence levels. Additionally, using the L1 for complex instructions or to check understanding can free up cognitive resources so that students can focus on practicing the target language more effectively.

Pedagogical Implications

These readings collectively show that a flexible, context-sensitive approach to L1 use can enhance rather than hinder target language learning. As Hall (2018) points out, teachers should develop clear principles for when and how to use the L1, ensuring it serves specific pedagogical functions rather than becoming the default classroom language. For instance, the L1 can be purposefully employed to introduce difficult grammar points, explain abstract concepts, or build background knowledge before engaging in target language practice.

Moore’s (2013) findings suggest that teachers can benefit from embracing translanguaging practices—encouraging students to draw on all their linguistic resources to make sense of content. This aligns with Liu and Xu’s (2018) argument that own-language use can support interactional equity by allowing less proficient learners to participate more fully in discussions and collaborative tasks.

However, overreliance on the L1 can reduce meaningful exposure to English. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to balance L1 support with opportunities for authentic target language use. Teacher training programs should include guidance on how to manage this balance effectively.

Reflection and Application

Before exploring this topic, I held the common belief that minimizing L1 use was always best practice. These new readings have broadened my perspective, showing that responsible own-language use can strengthen learners' understanding, reduce frustration, and create a more inclusive classroom environment. Moving forward, I plan to integrate L1 strategically—for example, allowing short L1 discussions to clarify instructions or check comprehension before task-based activities conducted in English.

Additionally, I am now more aware of how classroom interaction patterns can be shaped by the flexible use of both languages. I will aim to create opportunities for students to translanguage when necessary, while still maintaining English as the primary medium for communication and practice.

Conclusion

The topic of own-language use in ELT invites teachers to rethink rigid monolingual ideologies and to adopt more nuanced, research-informed practices. By recognizing learners' L1 as an asset rather than an obstacle, teachers can create richer, more supportive learning experiences. This extension project has deepened my understanding of bilingual classroom practices and provided practical strategies that I can adapt to my own teaching context.

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