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EFL Learners' Perceptions About the Challenges Implied in Learning Native Pronunciation in Guanajuato

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Abstract

Achieving native-like pronunciation is often viewed as an essential goal for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly when instructors are from native English-speaking backgrounds and establish teaching standards based on native fluency. However, the emphasis on attaining native pronunciation norms can present challenges for learners whose first language phonology context differs from English. This study explored the perspectives of beginner, intermediate, and upper intermediate-level EFL students at the University of Guanajuato regarding the challenges of learning native pronunciation in a non-native context taught by native English speakers. The findings highlight the complex dynamic between the students' desire for native-like proficiency dominance because of the recognition and praise provided by their teachers and general society and the difficulties EFL learners face in achieving this standard outside an immersive environment.

Keywords: native-like pronunciation, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), non-native context, teaching standards, proficiency dominance.

1. Introduction

In the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), many students perceive achieving native-like pronunciation as an essential skill to develop proficiency in the target language. Within a non-native context, a considerable number of teachers may originate from native English-speaking backgrounds. Consequently, these native English-speaking professors often establish teaching standards based on native-like fluency, which may foster an expectation among non-native students to strive for native-level proficiency. Therefore, pronunciation becomes a crucial aspect of speaking skills, requiring careful attention to word stress, phonetic nuances, intonation, and rhythm. However, non-native speakers often use phoneme sequences grounded in their first language forms that deviate from expected norms. Moreover, an excessive emphasis on attaining native-like pronunciation standards might lead to decreased motivation among learners to pursue proficiency in the target language. Nevertheless, a teaching perspective that strives for pronunciation improvement can significantly facilitate effective language communication and comprehension in conversational interactions among students to domain the target language. Hence, understanding the perspectives of EFL students about native pronunciation is important to enhance the learning environment and develop more responsive and engaging language skill practices.

In this sense, the current study seeks to explore the perceptions of beginner and intermediate-level students regarding the issues of learning native-like pronunciation in a non-native context such as Guanajuato, particularly when taught by teachers from native English-speaking backgrounds. Henceforth, in this sense, the purpose of the present research is to understand and analyze the perceived advantages, challenges, and relevance attributed by students to this approach, aiming to gain insights into the dynamics and effectiveness of teaching native pronunciation in foreign linguistic settings.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Non-native language learning context*

Non-native language learning contexts are concerned with the limited conditions in which the students are expected to develop target language proficiency without many opportunities to test and practice such specific skills. Hence, the classroom interaction between teachers and classmates corresponds to the main resource of both the input and output of the learners (Selinker & Gass, 2008).

In this regard, Doughty and Long (2008) claim that because in such a social scenario, English or other foreign languages are not the main instruments for communication, there is a lack of naturalistic exposure to incentives students to keep learning and practicing the target language, it highly possible that learners face plenty of challenges to construct an effective second language competence.

Furthermore, with respect to native pronunciation development in such an ambiance, according to Moyer (2013), “foreign accents are linguistic phenomena arising from the phonetic systems of two language varieties being different. Thus, phonetic properties of the speaker's first language are irretrievably carried over to the second language” (p. 11).

2.2 *Native pronunciation*

Pronunciation in the second language (L2) learning and teaching context is mainly conceptualized as the ability to produce speech correctly with regard to articulation, stress, and intonation of sounds. In this sense, among the principal objectives of learning a second language is accurate and fluent communication as a native speaker (Zhang, 2009).

According to Munro and Derwing (2011), native pronunciation is concerned with assembling speech structures, mental and neural processes, and cultural influences that reflect the domain in phonetic and performative first language skills. From this context, native pronunciation is a result of the immersion to which an individual develops the ability to produce language as the people around them make use of it.

However, as stated by Moyer (2013), “the ability to approximate native-like pronunciation is a demanding aspect of second language acquisition and represents one of the most persisting challenges for many learners. Yet, for many, acquiring nativlike pronunciation remains an important goal and benchmark of successful learning” (p. 1.). Hence, the nativeness principle is more important than the intelligibility principle, as it implies that learners perceive

such a skill as a possible and desirable aim that, when achieved, will be praised and perceived as effective L2 performance by society (Levis, 2005; Levis, 2020, as cited in O'Brien, 2021).

2.3 Native vs non-native pronunciation

Despite the number of teachers and students who align with the belief that native pronunciation is the ultimate skill to claim L2 dominance, many others consider that *it does correspond to the main feature of it*, although pronunciation is a relevant aspect of language L2 learning, it does correspond to the main feature of it. Derwing and Munro (2009) contend that “increasingly, applied linguists have questioned the importance of achieving a native accent, arguing instead for an instructional focus on intelligibility and communicative effectiveness” (p. 5). In this regard, communicative comprehension in L2 performance is the outcome of constant practice of accurate grammar, vocabulary usage, interaction, and meaningful message construction factors rather than solely native-pronunciation enhancement.

Jenkins (2005) argues that language learning and usage are deeply intertwined with social influences. Therefore, she suggests that the process of teaching and learning a second language should be viewed through a sociolinguistic conception. This perspective encourages students to focus on their construction of variety in the target language rather than striving for native-like pronunciation or forms.

However, possessing a pronunciation similar to that of a native speaker enhances the opportunities available to bilingual individuals. This indicates a broader societal acceptance of speech with a natural-sounding accent. According to Pennington and Rogerson-Revell (2019), learners strive for native-like pronunciation because within professional or academic settings, their competence in the target language may be questioned or perceived as inadequate.

2.4 Non-native language learning context

Non-native language learning contexts are concerned with the limited conditions in which the students are expected to develop target language proficiency without many opportunities to test and practice such specific skills. Hence, the classroom interaction between teachers and classmates corresponds to the main resource of both the input and output of the learners (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

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3. The study

The purpose of the present research is to explore the perceptions of students in Guanajuato regarding learning pronunciation within a non-native-speaking context. I aim to investigate the extent to which the skill of pronunciation may be associated with native-like standards or norms. Particularly, I will focus on the insights of students from the beginner to

intermediate stages of learning English. Moreover, I seek to understand the potential impact of adopting these norms on students' confidence in developing and practicing their pronunciation skills and overall, second language performance.

In this sense, this project strives to address the following research question:

What are the perspectives of the UG (University of Guanajuato) language department students regarding issues about English pronunciation in non-native contexts?

The paradigm selection for this research is qualitative, as pronunciation learning involves subjective interpretations, perceptions, and individual experiences. According to Lazaraton and Pennington (2002, as cited in Trappes-Lomax, 2004), "Qualitative research methods are designed to deal with the complexities of meaning in social context, they are naturalistic (not controlled), observational (not experimental), and more focused on problems of validity than on those of reliability and generalizability. Data will be 'real, rich, deep' rather than 'hard and replicable' " (p. 141). Also, studying EFL learners' perspectives on pronunciation in Guanajuato involves considering cultural, social, and linguistic contexts that significantly impact learners' attitudes toward native pronunciation. Stake (2010) states that the primary aim of the qualitative paradigm is to grasp understanding the social world since the focus lies in comprehending the inherent nature and dynamics of the observed setting.

This research project aims to analyze the diverse and personal interpretations that students from beginning to intermediate English levels hold regarding learning native pronunciation in non-native contexts. Thus, the employed method was case study. In this regard, Yin (2003) entails that one of its benefits is the allowance to "investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries and contexts are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Duff (2008) states that the case study method "focuses on the behaviors or attributes of individual learners or other individuals/entities" (p. 34).

3.1 Context and participants

The research context was Guanajuato city, specifically involving students enrolled in the Languages Department at the University of Guanajuato. The study concentrated on four female students, each pursuing majors in Political Sciences, Accounting, or Economics. Their age range is 19 to 22 years old.

These participants were selected to represent a diverse array of English proficiency levels, encompassing upper beginners, intermediate, and upper-intermediate students positioned within the 200-400 English course levels. The variety of proficiency levels was essential to capture diverse perspectives on native pronunciation learning within the EFL context. The four individuals involved in this study were provided with comprehensive information about the research. Their participation was voluntary, and they willingly consented by signing a form that stated their rights, including the option to participate, safeguard their information, and protect their identities.

3.2 Data collection techniques

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher the opportunity to elaborate an array of open-ended questions related to the study topic. In addition, such questions permit the researcher to obtain the participant's insights from their experiences through the self-construction and flexibility of the information shared (Given, 2008). As this research used a case study method, one requirement involved the researcher compiling students' responses concerning whether the

acquisition of native pronunciation has positively or negatively influenced their language learning process. Therefore, the selected instrument for this research is the semi-structured interview.

To conduct the process of data collection, the participants underwent individual interviews without prior knowledge of the presented questions, maintaining authenticity (See Appendix A). The interview questions were open-ended, and their responses were recorded. The data was directly organized into a single Micro level Table 1 (See Appendix B). This tabulated data showcased the progression from raw data to interpreted findings, highlighting critical stages in qualitative analysis.

The semi-structured interview provides the researcher with the opportunity to have an array of open-ended questions to be able to provide more insights into the rationale of the participant's experiences through the self-construction and flexibility of the information shared. (Ayres, 2012, as cited in Given, 2008). As this research used a case study method, one requirement involved the researcher compiling students' responses concerning whether the acquisition of native pronunciation has positively or negatively influenced their language learning process. Therefore, the selected instrument for this research is the semi-structured interview.

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3.3 Data analysis

The method selected to analyze qualitative data for this research was thematic analysis. Guest et al. (2012) define thematic analysis as the process of interpreting obtained information through identified patterns and the researcher's involvement. "Reliability is of greater concern with thematic analysis because more interpretation goes into defining the data items (i.e., codes) as well as applying the codes to chunks of text" (p. 9).

The initial phase of the current study involved collecting raw data extracted from interviews conducted with the participants. Each interview yielded extracts representing units of meaning pertinent to the research focus. These extracts underwent coding, where significant themes or ideas were identified and labeled with specific codes derived from the data. The subsequent phase involved interpreting the coded data, where I delved into the identified themes and analyzed the underlying meanings derived from the extracts.

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4. Findings

From the analysis of the responses from the participants for the present study, a number of four main themes emerged. These themes involve the diverse perspectives and experiences shared by UG language department English students in the UG language department, highlighting issues related to learning aspects of native pronunciation in their educational contexts.

4.1 *Negative reactions in the classroom when committing pronunciation errors and mistakes*

“Limited pronunciation skills will make learners lose their self-confidence and result in negative influence for learners to estimate their credibility and abilities” (Morley, 1998 as cited in Zhang, 2009: 35). In this sense, when asked about having a concern or fear of imitating native pronunciation, Valeria and Isa (beginner English students) commented the following:

“I am fearful (to attempt native pronunciation) because if I say something wrong, I do not like that other people, by inertia laugh at me, or that they can see and notice that I am not pronouncing correctly.” (Valeria 0203, Q9)

“(My concern) is that someone looks at me like implying ‘What are saying?’ because I do not pronounce (English language) as them.” (Isa 0102, Q9)

Their insights entail a feeling of demotivation and fright among students regarding the practice of pronunciation because of the responses and reactions from people in the classroom whenever they do not sound native-like or when they make errors or mistakes leading them to think they must avoid committing them during their language learning process if they want to be understood in L2.

According to Rajadurai (2006), regardless of the student’s intention to recognize the cultural significance of their accents and identity, learners seem aspirational to achieve native-like pronunciation conditioned by a sense of insecurity and self-doubt of their L2 abilities and how they acquired them during their learning process. In this respect, Dan and Lucy responded the following about being concerned about attempting native pronunciation.

“(Native pronunciation) is not something I consider it concerning. However, depending on the context or the people you are with, you can sometimes feel nervous or insecure about your English-speaking skills. For example, when you do not have a one hundred percent *proper* pronunciation.” (Dan 0304, Q9)

Dan (upper-intermediate English student) entails that according to the environment in which is, she might experience negative reactions to attempting native pronunciation as it could make evident her lack of corresponding native-like speaking elements. Although she is generally unbothered by the task, she seems to associate *proper* pronunciation with native pronunciation.

“I am not fearful to attempt English native pronunciation. In the way I see it, it is like a goal to achieve because it is not like I have to pretend that I am from *there*, but rather a way to sound much more professional, with more diction, and that is really how one gets to domain the language.” (Lucy 0405, Q9)

In this regard, the perception that Lucy (intermediate English student) has about having native pronunciation is that, as a student, it is important to practice the skill often to improve overall L2 performance. She is unafraid to try since, for her, the goal is not to pretend to be or become a native speaker but rather to enhance her pronunciation and comprehension skills in the target language.

4.2 *The complexity of native pronunciation*

According to Lund (2003), the process of listening, incorporating, and producing new sounds (pronunciation overall) is one of the most complex features of the language, as it requires the synchronous activity of cognitive and physiological systems to restructure and adapt the prior articulatory process to a new one.

When the participants were asked about specific words or sounds, they found challenging to pronounce as a native speaker, Isa explained:

“I think most words in English are difficult for me to pronounce (correctly) as the ones who know (the language) no matter how hard I try, even when they keep telling me ‘Roll your tongue’ like this.” (Isa, 0102, Q5)

The student highlights her inability to pronounce words as the people “who knows”, relating native pronunciation to proficient pronunciation. Even with instructions, it is difficult for her to understand how to stress sound to talk as a native speaker highlights her inability to pronounce words as the people “who knows,” relating native pronunciation to proficient pronunciation. In this regard, Derwing and Munro (2009) entail that achieving native-like pronunciation in a foreign language is highly challenging for the majority of learners, particularly in non-native settings with limited exposure to natural language use and scarce opportunities for interaction with native speakers.

In this regard, Lucy adds:

“There are certain words that are complicated for me to say, well, I mean to pronounce because of nervousness.” (Lucy 0405, Q5)

The participant embraces the complexity involved in some features of English pronunciation. However, she attributes this perception to being nervous when practicing such a skill. “When anxious, some learners experience a kind of blockage that prevents them from retrieving pronunciation rules and realizing them in speech output, even for words they can typically pronounce without difficulty.” (Gkonou, 2018: 65).

4.3 The importance of having a native-like pronunciation

According to Bergmann et al. (2016), for many second language learners, achieving native-like pronunciation is a primary objective, and is frequently seen as a crucial indicator of proficiency. When participants were then asked how important they consider having a native-like pronunciation in their second language learning process.

Dan explained:

“I do not think that having a perfect pronunciation is fundamental to domain this language or another, because there are other features that have more importance, but it might help you to develop confidence when speaking (in the target language).” (Dan 0304, Q7)

The participant acknowledges that being able to speak English like a native person might make you feel more confident, but it will not be the aspect by which one will obtain language proficiency.

“I think it has a lot of importance because if you learn (the target language) from zero, I think you understand better the topic you are treating (in your language learning process).” (Valeria 0203, Q2)

Valeria seems to be associating native pronunciation with second language proficiency because such skills seem to be helpful once the topic becomes more complicated. Gelvanovsky (2002, as cited in Zhang, 2009) acknowledges pronunciation as a potential indicator of an individual's place of origin and cultural background. Pronunciation, according to Gelvanovsky, can be perceived as a main distinguishing factor in discerning whether a person is a non-native speaker. In addition, Gelvanovsky states that there are social values placed over native pronunciation entailing characteristics such as intelligence, competence, and confidence leading to privilege. The latter suggests that native pronunciation skill development might be important for students because of the social recognition and advantages that are implied.

“Maybe, or maybe not. I mean, I think it is up to each person.” (Isa 0102, Q6).

In this sense, the student considers that native pronunciation relevance relies on each individual's personal goals, learning pace, skills, and interest in the target language.

4.4 The approach to which teachers aim the student's improvement of their pronunciation

Mere error correction on pronunciation is not enough for the enhancement of the learner's interlanguage. Instead, feedback errors should be prioritized. Constructive feedback enhances improvement in the student's target language performance than judgmental feedback, as its purpose is to foster confidence and facilitate the overall development of L2 proficiency (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In this sense, Isa and Lucy referred to how they would like to receive feedback regarding their practice of native pronunciation.

When asked about correction, Isa elaborated:

"Being in constant communication with people that know (the target language) and not being judged (when making errors or mistakes) might help me to improve." (Isa 0102, Q10)

The student aims for guidance and support instead of judgment from her teachers to improve her pronunciation and overall performance in the L2.

Lucy, on the other hand, states:

"The fact that people that speak my same language are the ones that teach me English makes me feel surer about myself when I have to ask about any doubts that I have in the same that if you are mistaken, you have the facility for them to correct you." (Lucy 0405, Q1)

She feels more confident when being corrected by people or teachers who are not native speakers as they might understand the struggle and difficulty behind developing the skill of (native) pronunciation of an L2.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I explored *the perspectives of the UG English language students regarding the challenges they face in learning native pronunciation*. The frame of reference that UG language students have about the issues of learning native pronunciation in a non-native context. In this sense, I aimed to determine the extent to which this learning aspect might be subject to native standards, thus affecting the confidence of the student to learn and perform the target language. *The study involved four female students: two beginners, one intermediate, and one upper intermediate*. The participants of this study were four female students from different English-level backgrounds, comprising two beginners, one intermediate, and one upper-intermediate.

Furthermore, to address the research question, I conducted semi-structured interviews with open questions to understand EFL students' struggles with achieving native-like pronunciation. Most participants mentioned fear, nervousness, and insecurity due to negative reactions from classmates and teachers when making mistakes. They found native pronunciation challenging due to differences in sound and diction with their L1. Half of the participants valued native pronunciation as essential for praise, job opportunities, and language mastery, while the other half considered it less important or dependent on personal goals. All participants acknowledged the need for pronunciation correction but preferred constructive, nonjudgmental feedback to encourage improvement.

Furthermore, to respond to the research question, I conducted a semi-structured interview with open questions to gather the insights of the participants in order to understand the struggles and challenges implied for EFL students to achieve native-like pronunciation. In this sense, the majority of the participants mentioned experiencing fear, nervousness, and insecurity when performing their pronunciation skills as a consequence of committing an error or a mistake when attempting native-like pronunciation since the latter has led to negative reactions from classmates and teachers. In addition, all of the participants consider that native pronunciation is a complex task to perform because of the differences in sound and diction with their L1. Meanwhile, half of the participants value the native-pronunciation skill as an essential and relevant part of the L2 learning process since they associate it with receiving praise inside and outside the classroom, better job opportunities, and the domain of the target language. However, the remaining half of the participants consider that native-pronunciation skill development is less important than other language-learning skills or that it depends on each student's personal goals, needs, and interests in the language. Finally, the four participants acknowledge that correction is needed in their pronunciation and overall learning process. However, the approach they would appreciate receiving guidance to improve their L2 native and non-native enhancement of performance is through constructive and nonjudgmental feedback that incentivizes constant effort to improve.

There were a few limitations that are worth addressing. First, the small number of participants may have limited the findings on native pronunciation issues. Interviewing more students could have provided more extensive insights. Second, the participants' English levels only covered three of the six CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference) levels. Including students from all levels could have offered a broader range of perspectives on the impact of native pronunciation issues across different L2 learning stages. Third, all participants were female, which, although not significantly affecting the findings, might have produced different outcomes if more male participants had been included. Lastly, I recommend further research on discrimination and racism towards non-native pronunciation. This study focused on the perspectives of a narrow group of non-native students, whose views on "appropriate" pronunciation were not merely about effective communication but about adopting native-like standards to avoid social and cultural rejection and to gain the advantages that native pronunciation provides. There were a few limitations that are worth addressing. First, the number of participants involved in the research was narrow, perhaps the findings could have been further extensive and revealing of the issues regarding native pronunciation if more students were interviewed. Second, the English level of the participants corresponded to three of the six CEFRs (The Common European Framework of Reference) English language levels. Thus, in order to obtain a wider variety of perspectives to compare the impact perceived by more participants, students from all levels could have been part of the research to represent a more valuable resource to determine if issues with native pronunciation might be related to a specific L2 learning stage. Third, the gender of all the students is female and, although this factor did not represent a significant concern in any of the findings, such outcomes could have been different if more male participants were added to the research.

Lastly, as further research recommendations, I suggest the exploration of discrimination and racism towards non-native pronunciation as this study is specifically concerned with the perspectives of learning pronunciation skills from a narrow group of non-native context students, and most of their insights and reflections on "appropriate" pronunciation are linked not on mere effective comprehension and production of the target language, but on adopting native-like standards in pronunciation to favor of the plenty advantages that native pronunciation provides them to avoid social and cultural rejection.

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Appendix

- Appendix A: Instrument:

Interview questions on ‘EFL learner’s perspectives about learning native pronunciation in Guanajuato’

1. ¿Cómo te hace sentir el aprender pronunciación en inglés de parte de hablantes nativos del idioma?
 2. ¿Cuáles crees que son las ventajas de aprender pronunciación nativa desde un principio?
 3. ¿Consideras que la pronunciación nativa es desafiante? Y de ser así, ¿por qué?
 4. ¿Has notado alguna diferencia entre la manera en que los hablantes nativos pronuncian las palabras y la forma en que tú aprendiste en tus clases de inglés?
 5. ¿Hay algún sonido o alguna palabra en inglés que encuentras particularmente difícil de pronunciar como un hablante del idioma nativo?
 6. ¿Crees que aprender a pronunciar como un hablante nativo te ayudará a mejorar todas tus habilidades en el idioma?
 7. ¿Qué tan importante consideras el sonar como un hablante nativo del inglés en tu proceso de aprendizaje del idioma?
 8. ¿Has tenido alguna experiencia negativa o positiva que involucre pronunciación nativa?
 9. ¿Tienes alguna preocupación o miedo de intentar imitar la pronunciación nativa de este idioma?
- ¿Qué recursos o métodos consideras que te serían de ayuda para mejorar tu pronunciación nativa en inglés?

- Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Estoy consciente de que la privacidad y confidencialidad son altamente importantes. Esta investigación puede extenderse más allá de la recolección de la información y no solo para completar el proyecto de investigación, sino que también podría ser publicada en artículos, y/o presentada en congresos y/o foros académicos; por lo tanto, es altamente confidencial protegiendo la identidad de los participantes.

He sido informado que la información antes descrita y recolectada es confidencial y será usada única y exclusivamente para fines de investigación.

Yo, _____ doy mi consentimiento a _____ para usar la información recolectada con el propósito de completar un proyecto de investigación para la materia de Metodología de la Investigación, como parte de la licenciatura de Enseñanza del Inglés en la Universidad de Guanajuato.

Marcar con una X la opción deseada:

[] Doy mi consentimiento para participar y permitir a _____, obtener, administrar, resguardar y trabajar con la información que yo pueda proporcionarle. Estoy informado que la participación es voluntaria y podré retirarme del proyecto sin consecuencias.

[] No doy mi consentimiento para participar en el proyecto.

Nombre: _____

Firma: _____

Fecha: _____

Correo electrónico: _____

Data coding

Research Technique	Raw Data Extracts Unit of meaning	Code from Data	Interpretation	Data identifi catory
<u>Interview</u>	<u>(Hablar inglés como nativo) en mi perspectiva te abre como que las puertas a campos laborales amplios</u>	<u>Better job opportunities</u>	<u>The student thinks that being able to speak like a native speaker might be more attractive for employers (from different and varied job offers) that ask for English speakers as a skill that people who know it but lack native sound patterns.</u>	<u>Isa0102</u> <u>(Questi on 3)</u>
	<u>Considero que a la hora de estar ya en un ambiente laboral el hecho de que sepas inglés desde temprana edad te abre muchas puertas ya que vas este... mejorando y vas conociendo nuevas cosas en el idioma por ejemplo en el área de negocios</u>	<u>Better job opportunities</u>	<u>The student considers that having a native pronunciation from an early age appeals to wider and thus, better job opportunities. It might mean for her that having a native pronunciation improves your overall L2 performance and, therefore, your knowledge in business and other employment contexts.</u>	<u>Lucy0405</u> <u>(Questi on 2)</u>

	<u>Que (alguien) me este como corrigiendo o que se me quede viendo como de “¿Qué estás diciendo?” porque no lo dice, no lo digo como esa persona entonces si como que existe como cierto miedo</u>	<u>Fear</u>	<u>The student is afraid of the response from the teacher or someone that knows the language which may cause a demotivation on her performance to pronounce words as natives.</u>	<u>Isa 0102 (Question 9)</u>
	<u>Me da miedo porque si lo pronuncio bien o digo algo mal eh... no me gusta o siento feo que las demás personas por inercia se rían o vean que, pues no lo estoy pronunciando bien o algo así</u>	<u>Fear</u>	<u>The student feels intimidated by the possible negative responses towards any mistake in her pronunciation, making her think that she must avoid errors during her language learning process.</u>	<u>Valeria 0203 (Question 9)</u>
	<u>Pues creo que la mayoría (de las palabras) para mí sí son como difíciles de pronunciarlas a como las pronuncian las demás personas, bueno sobre todo las que saben, entonces por más que yo trate de hacerlo igual que ellos porque lo he intentado, como que te dicen, bueno a mí me han dicho que</u>	<u>Complexity</u>	<u>The student has the perception that most words in English language are complicated to pronounce like a native speaker, even when teachers or ‘people who knows’ explain to her how to do it.</u>	<u>Isa 0102 (Question 5)</u>

	<u>“no, es que haz la lengua como así” o cosas así, ¿sabes?</u>			
	<u>Pues sí, o sea, como que reducen muchas palabras y son cosas como que, pues obviamente en las clases no te las enseñan tal cual, no te enseñan tal cual como debes de decirlo y realmente no se habla así, se habla o muy ‘mocho’ o muy corto entonces pues no. Sí de repente a veces es más difícil así.</u>	<u>Complexity</u>	<u>The student considers that pronunciation is not taught very accurately (in terms of authentic usage of the language) in comparison to native speakers' pronunciation and ultimately, this causes for her to be complicated to know what the correct form is of saying things.</u>	<u>Valeria 0203 (Question 5)</u>
	<u>Sí hay ciertas palabras que se me dificulta hablar, bueno más bien pronunciar este por nervios,</u>	<u>Complexity</u>	<u>The student believes that some words are difficult to pronounce but mainly because of a feeling of nervousness when trying to sound like a native speaker.</u>	<u>Lucy04 05 (Question 5)</u>
	<u>Si no lo pronuncias (el inglés) tal... bueno no tal cual, pero si no lo pronuncias bien creo que puedes dar a entender otras cosas entonces pues ya ahí no... ahí la persona que te está escuchando pues si se saldría de</u>	<u>Be understandable</u>	<u>The student thinks that it is important to have a 'good pronunciation' in order to make yourself comprehensible in what you aim to express or communicate. Otherwise, because of the sounds you might be misleading the comprehension purpose.</u>	<u>Valeria 0203 (Question 3)</u>

	<u>todo el contexto, ¿no</u>			
	<u>Pues, siento que el estar en constante comunicación con personas que realmente sepan y que no sean, este... O sea, que no me juzguen pues ¿sabes? O sea, como que antes me ayuden a fortalecer... (conocimientos, habilidades, etc)</u>	<u>Feedback or correction</u>	<u>The student aims for guidance and support instead of judgement from her teachers to improve her pronunciation and thus, overall performance the L2</u>	<u>Isa0102</u> <u>(Question 10)</u>
	<u>Una vez vinieron unos familiares de Estados Unidos entonces traté como de hacer una pequeña oración o tratar como de empezar a hablarlo con ellos y si hubo una experiencia positiva porque me dijeron que lo estaba diciendo bien y que sí les dije lo que quería transmitir o preguntar entonces sí fue una... experiencia positiva.</u>	<u>Feedback or correction</u>	<u>The student seems to feel motivated and encouraged to keep learning the target language and practice her pronunciation when being praised by native speakers for her attempts and for being understood for what she wanted to express.</u>	<u>Valeria 0203</u> <u>(Question 8)</u>
	<u>Pues el propósito justamente es aprender y no pasa nada si te equivocas</u>	<u>Feedback and correction</u>	<u>The student considers that feedback and correction are both important aspects within the L2 learning process. Therefore, she views these practices as positive experiences</u>	<u>Dan0304</u> <u>(Question 5)</u>

	<u>porque pues lo corriges y ya está.</u>		<u>because they help her to improve in her performance, which is the reason why she at the classroom.</u>	
	<u>El que otras personas me enseñen inglés que hablan mí misma lengua me hace sentir un poco más segura a la hora de preguntar cualquier duda que tenga del idioma en el sentido de que si te equivocas pues tienes la... la facilidad de que te corrijan.</u>	<u>Feedback and correction</u>	<u>The student feels more confident when being corrected by people or teachers who are not native speakers as they might understand the struggle and difficulty behind developing the skill of (native) pronunciation of an L2.</u>	<u>Lucy0405</u> <u>(Question 1)</u>
	<u>Puede ser que sí y puede ser que no. O sea, como que ya depende de cada quien.</u>	<u>Importance of native pronunciation</u>	<u>The student thinks that native pronunciation relevance relies on each individual's goals, learning pace, skills, and interest with the target language</u>	<u>Isa0102</u> <u>(Question 6)</u>
	<u>Creo que eso tiene mucha importancia porque pues... si lo aprendes desde cero creo que vas entendiendo mejor los temas que vas viendo</u>	<u>Importance of native pronunciation</u>	<u>The student seems to be associating native pronunciation with second language proficiency, because such skills seem to be helpful once the topic becomes more complicated.</u>	<u>Valeria0203</u> <u>(Question 2)</u>
	<u>Yo... no considero que una pronunciación perfecta sea fundamental para manejar este o un idioma nuevo, y existen más características que llegan a tener mayor importancia...</u>	<u>Importance of native pronunciation</u>	<u>The student acknowledges that being able to speak English like a native person might make her feel more confident to practice speaking skills. However, she considers that it is not the most important factor when learning this or any other language as there are other equally or more aspects a learner needs to focus on to acquire proficiency.</u>	<u>Dan0304</u> <u>(Question 7)</u>

	<u>pero, sí te puede ayudar a mejorar tu seguridad al hablarlo.</u>			
	<u>Obviamente considero muy importante pronunciar el idioma inglés, pero en cuanto a la pregunta anterior este no creo que sea imposible este... así como... eh, puedes ir a otro estado y se te pega un acento... eh... igual cuando puedes visitar países donde hablan el idioma inglés puedes este... adquirir el mismo acento, por ejemplo, la misma dicción que ellos porque pues de una forma continua si estás allá.</u>	<u>Importance of native pronunciation</u>	<u>Students consider learning native pronunciation as relevant and crucial in L2 proficiency. However, she thinks that having an accent and being able to pronounce like a native speaker is related. Thus, native pronunciation can be acquired from exposure.</u>	<u>Lucy 0405 (Question 7)</u>



The Use of L1 in a Beginner L2 English Classroom: A Case Study in Mexico

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Abstract

The implementation of the L1 in EFL classes has been a topic of debate among educators and researchers. While some argue for an English-only approach, others recognize the potential benefits of using the L1 strategically. This case study investigates the strategic use of the first language (L1), Spanish, in a second language beginner-level (L2) English classroom in Mexico. The principal aim of this research is to explore the beliefs of beginner students about the implementation of the L1 in their English lessons. Data was collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires over a period of one semester. The findings suggest that the use of L1 is of much help, such as clarifying complex concepts, providing instructions, and creating a more comfortable learning environment. This study reveals that most students perceived the use of L1 beneficial, especially in understanding instructions and in situations where they felt anxious about their English language abilities. This study considers the importance of a balance between L1 and L2 use in the classroom.

Keywords: L1 use, L2 classroom, code-switching, affective filter, English language teaching, teaching learning process.

1. Introduction

The use of the L1 in a L2 classroom has been debated by language teaching professionals and researchers for years. Some academics argue that the use of L1 may disrupt L2 learning (Brown, 1994; Pacek, 2003; Wharton, 2004), while opponents claim that the use of L1 can facilitate the acquisition of L2 (Auerbach, 1993; Schweers, 1999; Hidayati, 2012). Research aids to understand the potential benefits of L1 incorporation to uncover strategies that can optimize language acquisition and create more valuable learning environments.

Finding a proper balance is crucial. Not relying excessively on L1 is important, as it could restrict exposure to L2 and slow down the acquisition process. Considering the lack of knowledge beginners' students have on the L2, instructors must make careful decisions regarding how much or how little they want to incorporate the L1. A wise use of the L1 does not reduce students' exposure to the L2 but instead can support in the teaching and learning process (Machaal, 2012).

The purpose of this case study is to examine the experiences and beliefs of beginner English students during the usage of the L1 in the classroom with the aim to understand the

emotions and perceptions they have. This contributes to the search for beneficial approaches and better practices that can be implemented in this beginner teaching context to cultivate greater efficacy in the learning process. This paper will analyze the major perspectives of students on L1 use in this specific teaching context of the L2 beginner classroom that took place at the University of Guanajuato.

2. Methodology

2.1 *The study*

One of my principal objectives as a teacher and for this research is to comprehend my students to the highest degree possible during lessons to make necessary adjustments going in future classes. The research question is the following: How do beginner-level EFL students perceive the use of their first language (L1) in an (EFL) classroom? This research has qualitative nature since it has the purpose to understand a social circumstance while exploring the different and unique experiences of the participants and analyze repeated patterns in this specific group. Yin (2003) defines case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries and contexts are not clearly evident” (p. 13). This method allows the researcher to take a complex and broad topic, or phenomenon, and narrow it down into a manageable research question. The use of a case study for my research is essential because it seeks to understand a problem in a group of people who share common characteristics.

2.2 *Context and participants*

This research was developed at the University of Guanajuato, in the language department with beginner English students. These students take classes at the University Language Center where the data was collected. The participants are two men and two women between the ages of 21 to 23 years old. All participants' first language is Spanish. They participate in the same workshop where the main focus of their classes to be able to carry out this study are speaking and listening skills. Students have had contact with English before but have very little knowledge of it. They have mentioned that they are not very used to putting their English into practice in their other English classes. As well, students have had contact with English before but have very little knowledge of it. Each participant was assigned a number to mention specific information regarding their opinions. Before the interview and data collection, the participant was shown the confidentiality letter and the reasons for carrying out this research were explained.

2.3 *Instruments*

Semi-structured interviews are used to analyze from the different perspectives of the interviewees their own experiences and see if there is a common factor in their perspectives. Implementing semi-structured interviews for this research made the collecting of data richer than just asking straightforward question. This instrument allowed me to ask for more information if needed. As Jamshed (2014: 88) states, “allowing flexibility in the conduct of the interview makes it possible to adapt the questions where necessary, clarify doubt and ensure that the responses are properly and clearly understood by repeating or rephrasing the questions.”

As well, the usage of questionnaires facilitated the comparison of the responses of the participants. Questionnaires are not time-consuming and can be quite clear and concise. I wanted to have very specific answers with not too much openness to achieve clearer ideas during the investigation.

Before starting with the case study, the participants were informed that they would be observed and analyzed for the purpose of the investigation. However, this was not constantly emphasized, allowing the participants to focus on their class without feeling they were being constantly evaluated. After several sessions, the participants were notified that they would be asked to complete a questionnaire and participate in an interview to gather additional data to complete the research findings. The questionnaires were applied first, this to introduce what the semi-structured interviews were going to be about and for the participant to start reflecting on their answers. Following the semi-structured interviews, an initial set of essential questions was prepared in advance. However, as each interview progressed, me as the researcher added more questions based on the participant's responses and the flow of the conversation. I took notes, writing down key words and phrases related to both the questions asked and the answers provided to analyze them later. This flexible approach allowed for a more organic and personalized interview experience, while still ensuring that the main topics were addressed.

2.4 Data processing and organization

Braun and Clarke (2017) defined thematic analysis as “A method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data” (p. 1). Similarly, they explain that thematic analysis provides a procedural system to generate codes and themes from qualitative data. A thematic analysis was conducted for this research to review the data with the use of interview transcripts and questionnaires. As well, the data was examined through codes and applied to identify common themes. The process of how the experiment was conducted was the same for each of the participants. A micro and macro level analysis were carried out.

Analyzing the data on a micro level, it is important to examine individually the experiences of the chosen background. Focusing on their roles and own perspectives to have a distinct result that will be as well analyzed on a macro-level basis. On a macro level, with all the information that was collected through the data, like notes, summaries, important topics that were taken into consideration during the interviews, and so on must be coded. The macro level analysis looks at the bigger picture environment and does not focus on specific information. It looks for a generalization of the data instead of just focusing on details alone. It helps to understand how the case is presented with no specific information about it. As well, it explains how the case is part of a larger system.

3. Literature review

3.1 Second language learning

The study of how second language learning works has been ongoing for several years. It is an immensely rich and varied field that has had the purpose to look for innovative ways to improve learning and teaching. Second language learning is described as the process of learning a new language other than the first language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Littlewood (2004) refers to it as “any language that is learnt when the first language system is already in place, no distinction is made between the “second,” “third,” or even “fourth” (etc.) language that a person learns” (p. 502). Second language learning requires explicit study or exposure, past the critical period when first language acquisition occurs naturally.

Having discussed the process of learning a second language, it is equally important to define the concept of first language acquisition. The first language, also abbreviated as L1, is the language a person acquires from birth in which the person is most fluent in and the one they learn to think and communicate in. It is also defined by Saville-Troike (2012: 4) as “languages which are

acquired during early childhood and that they are learned as part of growing up among people who speak them.”

Spanish is the student’s first language since they come from México. In México, English is taught as a second language in schools. It is not officially considered as a secondary language since it has not been culturally integrated and an urgent need to nationally learn it has not arisen. As a result, the participants often struggle to practice the language skills they learn in class into their everyday lives and real-world interactions.

Referring to this, Lightbown and Spada (2013) state the following:

A foreign language is one not widely used in the learners’ immediate social context which might be used for future travel or other cross-cultural communication situations or studied as a curricular requirement or elective in school, but with no immediate or necessary practical application (p. 36)

Even if there are differences between learning an L1 and an L2, in both cases, plenty of interaction is needed to start producing any language.

3.2 Factors influencing L1 and L2 use

Numerous aspects can influence how the L1 is used in EFL classes; it is not a random choice, but is a decision influenced by a complex interaction of elements. These aspects include students’ proficiency level, as well affective factors such as student anxiety and motivation. Additionally, the role of L1 in EFL classes also depends on cultural factors such as how the target language is perceived in the community. Learning a second language, being influenced by so many factors, it is necessary to break them down and carefully examine the specific context in which our class is situated.

3.2.1 Language proficiency

Language proficiency is defined as “one’s competence in speaking a particular language” (Indeed Editorial Team, n.d.). It is the ability to communicate effectively and use a language accurately. Beginner students lack language and learning strategies, this is why starting learning a new language is a complex task that requires patience and can generate frustration and confusion. For this reason, it is useful to use the first language for beginner-level proficiency students, to reduce stress and continue with this process in a more relaxing way. As the student begins to acquire new knowledge in their target language, they start to feel more comfortable communicating in it without the need to depend on their first language. A study in a Japanese University conducted by Norman (2008) found out that beginner students prefer more use of the L1 while advanced level students prefer less L1. Even beginner students mentioned that they preferred that the teacher know their L1, while many among the advanced students preferred that the instructor does not know the L1 at all, this to experience an all-English environment. In this way we can see that progress can be made little by little so that students feel comfortable achieving their goals.

3.2.2 Affective factors

In addition to language proficiency levels, affective factors also play a crucial role in determining the appropriate use of the L1 in EFL classes. Affective factors are defined as “aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude with condition of behavior” (Arnold & Brown, 1999: p.1). These are the emotional aspects and attitudes that influence the language learning process. Nation (2003) suggests that using the L2 can be a source of anxiety to shy learners who feel they are not

very proficient in the L2. “It has been observed that L1 use can create a more cohesive and relaxed classroom environment” (Alshehri, 2017: 21).

Using the first language of the students help increase motivation, reduce anxiety, and build a supportive classroom environment. Meyer (2008) states the following “the absence of the student’s first language when explaining the unfamiliar can raise the level of anxiety the students feel” (p. 151). Indeed, according to Brown (2000), language anxiety has a strong affective influence on second language acquisition.

3.2.3 *Cultural factors*

The English language is considered as a global language. Nowadays, being fluent in English is even considered a basic skill, it seems like it is not learned as a preference anymore but as a necessity. In Mexico even if English is considered as a foreign language, it is still important due to the closeness and relationship that Mexico has with the United States. The perceptions Mexicans have towards the English language is quite divided. Despaigne (2010) stated that English can be considered as a path for a better way of life, or it can be the living image of invasion and imperialism. The perception may depend on many factors like the social class to which one belongs, beliefs or personal experiences.

Some positive perceptions are caused by the benefits that learning English can give us. For example, better job opportunities with better incomes, communication with other parts of the world, access to different media and information, the possibility of study abroad and more. Despaigne (2010) mentions a survey that was conducted in May 2008, based on an online questionnaire where 300 UPAEP (Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla) students participated. In which mentions “90% of UPAEP learners know that English is extremely important, and almost 99% of them think that it will help them in their professional growth” (p. 65).

As well, there exist negative perceptions that usually refer to the influence that the United States has over México. As Chasan and Ryan (1995) mentions the impact that the US has politically, culturally and economically in México has increased immigration, racism and has imposed the roles of the dominant and dominated. This is why some people do not feel comfortable learning the language of a country which maintains an unequal relationship with México.

3.3 *Code switching*

A code has many ways to describe it depending on the context. In communications, a code is “a rule for converting a piece of information (e.g., a letter, a word or phrase) into another form or representation not necessarily of the same sort” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2010: 273). Code switching is used when there are of two or more languages varying in the same conversation. According to Myers-Scotton (1993: 47) code switching refers to the “use of two or more languages in the same conversation, usually within the same conversational turn, or even within the same sentence of that turn.” However, excessive and indiscriminate code-switching in class should be avoided to maximize target language exposure.

4. Analysis of the results

In this section, the results of the investigation will be discussed. The main themes that were taken into consideration for the study were the following: Strategies for the effective use of

the L1, Factors that influence the use of the L1, only one language in classroom and English as an imposition.

4.1 Strategies for the effective use of the L1

Using strategies implementing the L1 can help students to comprehend instructions, explain the meaning of words or to clear complex concepts (Tang, 2010). Code switching can be an effective strategy for communication by changing the languages for a better comprehension of the message than by keeping the statement totally in the same language. Applying this to lessons, code switching mostly can be used during instructions to facilitate communication.

Regarding the question: “When do you think it is necessary to use Spanish in your English class?” The answers of the students were the following:

Participant No. 3 mentioned the following: “When they (teachers) see that we are unable to understand the instructions and we look very lost, I think it's a good idea, as a last resort, to explain them in Spanish.”

Participant No. 4 stated: “When there are very complicated things or words that I have never heard before or that I do not understand the context they are in, well, there's no other choice but to resort to Spanish. Because in English, I just couldn't understand.”

The use of L1 can help reduce students' anxiety and frustration because if they do not understand the instructions, they will not know how to proceed with the activities. Harbord (1992) states that teachers giving instruction in the L1 can facilitate the comprehension and will be easier for the objectives of the activities to be met specially to beginners.

In summary, the students agreed that in certain situations, the use of English and code switching is necessary, mostly when giving overly complex concepts or long instructions. However, this should only be done when the teacher has already attempted other alternatives that have proven unsuccessful. Both comments suggest that code-switching should be used as a strategic resource, not as the first option.

4.2 Factors that influence the use of the L1

Lowering anxiety and increasing motivation are crucial factors to take into consideration when deciding how the target language is going to be used in class. It is important to reflect on which type of environment we want to create as teachers. Creating a low-anxiety environment where learners are comfortable using their first language can be a tool for understanding and acquiring the second language.

This time, the question was: Why do you think the use of Spanish in your class can be useful? This question was asked to see if the students really can see a benefit on how they feel when English can be switched if they really have the necessity. Because when English is the only language in which they can express themselves, it often happens that students prefer not to speak at all to avoid making mistakes in the target language.

Participant No.4: “To create a comfortable environment, it's fine (the use of Spanish). If you make a mistake, it's okay, and we're here in a trusted environment because I think learning a new language is intimidating.”

Participant No. 2: “Well, since we are beginners, I think it is much more complicated to always use English. That's why it is necessary (to use Spanish); otherwise, it would be too difficult, and I don't think I would participate.”

It can be observed that, in the case of both participants, they consider that the use of their first language makes them feel more secure and supported in their learning. As the Participant No. 2 points out, for beginners, constantly using English can be complicated and challenging, they do not yet have vast knowledge; they are just beginning to build it and may feel frustrated in the process. The use of Spanish can make the learning process more manageable and less daunting for students who are just starting to learn English

Stephen Krashen (1982) mentions that factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and motivation can impact language acquisition. By decreasing anxiety, students become more motivated and will participate more in class. Allowing the use of the L1, participation will be encouraged instead of having students who will feel hesitant to engage in class.

If the student is aware that it is okay not to have much experience with the language, and the teacher assures them that they will accompany them in their development, the student will have a more pleasant experience.

4.3 Only one language in classroom

For several years of study, total immersion in the target language has been considered to benefit the students. It was believed that the use of the native language in a second language acquisition classroom could be counterproductive. This is why it is not helpful as well not using the target language constantly. This is especially true because, in Mexico, outside of school hours, it is not common to practice English due to the country's context. So reducing interaction with this language is counterproductive. During school hours, they should practice it as much as possible, while gradually adding new information.

The participants were asked if they would like their classes to be taught in Spanish. In this case, the answer of the participant No. 1 was the following: "Not at all, on the contrary, I like having to make an effort to speak English because that's what it's about; if the class were in Spanish, then I wouldn't be learning."

This extract is important since it expresses what all the participants think about this topic. Students are aware of the benefits of immersion in the target language, if all the class was in Spanish, it would be challenging to acquire new vocabulary or for students to put their grammar into practice, especially when speaking. Speaking skills are among the more challenging abilities for students, given that they occur immediately. Learning a new language is challenging, not something that can be achieved immediately, and requires improvement in many aspects.

If the student does not seek that improvement and the teacher does not challenge the students, there would not be any input from where to learn. Miles (2004) suggests that if learners know that their teacher always relies on the L1, students may stop from attempting to use the L2 in situations where their level is pressed and communication becomes difficult, thus negatively impacting the learners' opportunities to challenge themselves.

4.4 English as an imposition

As Tian and Macaro (2012) stated, the sociocultural perspective is particularly important in the context that, with English being seen as a global language, the notion arises that by excluding students' L1, English is being imposed, and this within the classroom approaches linguistic imperialism.

Not always there will be a good relationship with a language if the student feels that this subject does not benefit them and only takes away their time. This is one of the main reasons

why a student may feel that English is being imposed on them rather than learning it out of enjoyment.

As well, the participants answered the following regarding if they felt that learning English was an imposition:

Participant No. 1: “Yes, actually, yes. I think during the first years, I always took English at school, so for the first years, it felt like an imposition to me, but now that I know it is necessary, I study it more willingly.”

Participant 2: Oh, no, I think I like it. Personally, I believe that nowadays it is necessary because we are a globalized world. I think it is a matter of preference because I want to do it.

It can be observed that the participants have similar opinions. Although Participant No. 1 felt it was an imposition at first, over the years, like Participant No. 2, they understood that learning this language would benefit them in the future. All participants’ opinions converge on the same point. As university students, they understand the importance of this language in the workplace. None of them show any reluctance to learn English.

As teachers, we must consider the context in which our students find themselves. It is crucial to take into account that beginner students have never had prior contact with English, and it is very uncommon for them to be immersed in the language outside the classroom. For this reason, it is important that the learning of a second language (L2) takes place with patience and a lot of support from the teacher. Perceiving English as an imposition can decrease the student's motivation, as this language may be associated with negative emotions that do not foster a comprehensive and relaxed environment.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the study found some of the benefits of the usage of the L1 in L2 classes. First, it was discovered that moderate and strategic use of L1, especially at the initial levels, can facilitate understanding. The usage of the L1 could be beneficial to adapt to the rhythm of the class, especially during instructions. Second, there is an immense benefit in applying code switching in the education field. Code switching helps to facilitate comprehension during communication because alternating between the native language and the target language helps students better acquire complex concepts. It helps providing students with some familiar words from their first language while encountering new and unfamiliar concepts in the second language (L2). Third, another often overlooked benefit is the preservation of students’ cultural identity. By nurturing something as significant as part of their human formation and culture since, the use of the L1 can positively impact their sense of belonging. Fourth, the restriction of the L1 causes the anxiety of students. Students feel more at ease when they can communicate and relay a little in their L1. Not having enough knowledge in the L2 will be an obstacle and cause frustration to the learners.

Some practical implications about the findings to develop L2 classes in beginners’ level is to adapt both languages in the class with a moderate usage of the L1. For example, avoiding direct translation during the lessons. The reason for this is that the student will be constantly thinking in their L1 and translating all the phrases they want to express into their target language, which will affect their production process, making it slower.

A route to implement the previous findings is to design and adapt activities that can mediate the usage of both languages. For example, after a lesson or activity in L2, allowing students to summarize what they have learned in their native language ensures that they have understood correctly. Another method that I tend to use personally as a teacher, is providing instructions first in L2 and then repeating them in L1 to guarantee comprehension before starting

the activity. It is also important that before participating in front of the class, which can be the most anxiety-inducing for students, they engage in small group discussions. This allows students to discuss and process information in their L1 within small groups before sharing in L2 with the entire class.

Some of the limitations that this study had was a limited number of participants since it is needed to have a greater number of people so that the study can have a main response that truly reflects more in the results. On the other hand, with only 5 participants, their answers are similar, it is needed to take into consideration more points of view to have more variation in the responses. For further research, it is recommended to constantly monitor the advance of the student and analyze how much the usage of their first language should be reduced depending on their growth. As well, the implementation of scaffolding strategies can facilitate complex tasks managing it into easy steps to guide students while slowly removing the assistance to develop independency. The activities provided in scaffolding that can help with instructions can be visual aids, cues, step-by-step instructions, and more.

Finally, as teachers, it is important to maintain constant and effective communication with our students so that they can feel comfortable approaching us. This allows us to understand what strategies we can implement in our class to make it more enjoyable and beneficial for our students, ultimately leading to better learning outcomes. As well, during this research it was found that even if the use of L1 provides comprehensible input and lowers anxiety, the L2 should still be the predominant language for the students to develop competence.

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