FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE OF L1 IN TEACHING GRAMMAR CLASS OF PROSPECTIVE ESL TEACHERS IN A PHILIPPINE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
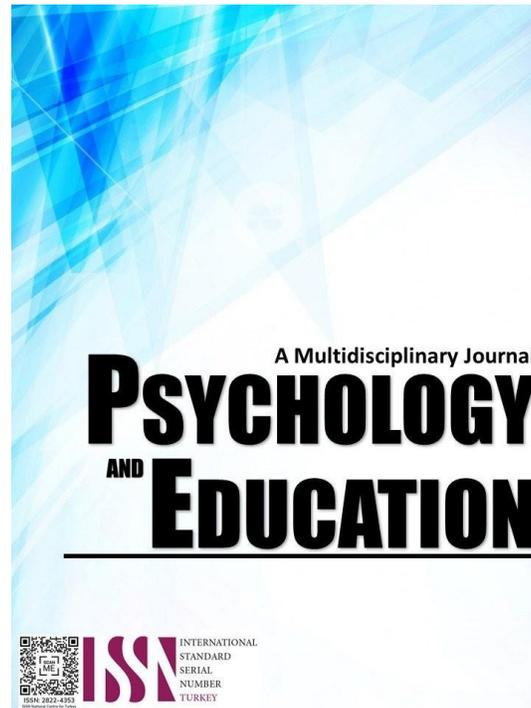
Factors Influencing the Use of L1 in Teaching Grammar Class of Prospective ESL Teachers in a Philippine Higher Education Institution

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the use of Language 1 (L1) in the Teaching Grammar class of 24 prospective English as a Second Language (ESL)/(L2) teachers in a Philippine Higher Education Institution. The majority of the research that has been done on L1 usage in language classes is oriented on teachers' opinions, with little attention paid to students' viewpoints directly or in-depth. This study aimed to highlight this disparity and stimulate more investigation into students' views on L1 usage in an English course. This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design, utilizing observation and semi-structured interviews to gather necessary data during the second semester of school year 2023-2024. The study revealed that most participants used their L1 during their Teaching Grammar class. Using their L1 to communicate complex data helps them engage more deeply with the topic. However, it hinders the growth of English as the academic language. Anxiety and limited vocabulary were the factors unveiled. Anxiety may have been induced by past experiences, societal expectations, or academic constraints. Moreover, the participants frequently code-switch since they lack vocabulary. This suggests the need for vocabulary-building strategies. Hence, the findings highlight the need for targeted strategies to support students in their language learning journey. School administrators may provide facilities or learning resources for curriculum implementers to include in language-acquisition activities. Future researchers may delve into action research by using strategy and intervention materials.

Keywords: *English curriculum, ESL teachers, Language 1 (L1), Language 2 (L2), teaching grammar*

Introduction

Language functions as an essential instrument for communication and is deeply connected to cognitive and educational processes. Language norms, regulated by rules and procedures, express and examine meaning. It is essential in shaping culture, facilitating personal identity development, socialization, and nurturing interpersonal ties. Language enables people to broaden their experiences, contemplate their ideas and behaviors, and enhance society's progress. It supports intellectual, social, and emotional development across several learning areas.

The rest of the nation is observing the Philippines' implementation of Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), making Language 1 (L1) the medium of instruction. The Department of Education (DepEd) launched a larger initiative with the adoption of MTB-MLE, which is based on the results of earlier researches that demonstrate the advantages of using the L1 as the primary language of instruction (Burton, 2013). According to these researches, minority language learners who acquired literacy in their L1 performed better academically than those who studied in a second (L2) language. They proposed that the early establishment of a foundation in the L1 facilitates the acquisition of L2.

According to a study by Zergani (2016), concepts that are already grasped in the first language are easier to transfer into the second language as language development advances. But the emphasis moves from using one's native tongue exclusively to using a second language. As a result, the study unequivocally proved that learners of both their mother tongue and a second language who study simultaneously benefit from improved linguistic and educational growth. They get a deeper comprehension and become proficient in using a variety of language systems for comparison and contrast, which increases their depth of knowledge. Furthermore, it was shown that proficiency and achievement in one's mother tongue are important indicators of proficiency in a second language.

Additionally, a student's L1 is crucial in helping them become more proficient in English. According to Silvani (2014), in certain situations, instructors and students might benefit from using their L1 to assist them in learning English, which can speed up language acquisition. Group conversations, for example, facilitate communication, idea exchange, and conceptual growth. Additionally, L1 enables students to communicate displeasure or challenges and clarifies instructions and pronunciation (Kasim et al., 2019).

Further, it has been shown that learning L2 more productively and effectively occurs when L1 is used in English lessons (Cudi et al., 2014).

However, scholars, academics, educational administrators, instructors, parents, students, and other Basic Education stakeholders have all objected to implementing the MTB-MLE curriculum. Because there was no native translation available for the educational materials, Valerio's (2015) research showed that teachers were unsure whether the resources they already had would enable them to really comprehend the MTBE. Additionally, the research included actual data demonstrating that training focused only on mother tongue is insufficient to improve students' academic performance.

Ong'uti et al. (2016) discovered that both educators and students had unfavorable attitudes towards instruction and learning in mother tongue.

Cook (2001) evaluated the usage of L1 in the classroom and looked at the benefits of employing L1 in L2 instruction. The main focus of the research was the inconsistencies across various linguistic systems, especially about syntax and grammar. Students must thus focus only on learning L2 in order to comprehend it. According to Cook's position, which linguists and educators widely hold, students need to reduce or completely give up using their L1 to absorb the unique linguistic components of an L2. Gaining exposure is essential to understanding a new language. As such, it is recommended that students only interact with L2 speakers and converse in the L2.

The predominant study on L1 use in language classrooms focuses on teachers' perspectives, with less consideration given to students' ideas, either directly or comprehensively. This research aimed to illuminate this gap and encourage further exploration of students' perspectives on L1 use in an English course.

The curriculum of the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English at the Higher Education Institution in Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines, expects the learner to demonstrate communicative competence. Aside from being well-read by reading an array of literature, the student can express himself in written and spoken discourse using English. The use of L1 in English classes is a topic that holds significant implications for the curriculum.

Extensive research and debate have been conducted on using L1 in education, particularly in multilingual societies. This instance raises questions about language acquisition, cognitive development, and the effectiveness of language instruction. Understanding the factors affecting the use of L1 in the Teaching Grammar class of prospective ESL teachers is crucial for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers.

Hence, this research study aimed to ascertain the factors affecting the frequent use of L1 in the Teaching Grammar class of prospective ESL teachers in a Philippine Higher Education Institution during the second semester of school year 2023-2024. The study sought to achieve the following objectives: (1) determine how frequently the participants use L1 in their Teaching Grammar class, and (2) unravel the factors affecting the frequency of participants' utilization of L1.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). According to Creswell (2011), the explanatory sequential design prioritizes the quantitative and qualitative phases. The second qualitative phase's goals are to explain the findings from the first quantitative phase and sometimes explain outliers that do not fully align with the gathered data. The word "explanatory" refers to using qualitative data analysis to explain the quantitative phase's findings.

The researcher first gathered the utterances of the participants using L1. Frequency of the responses were recorded. Then, factors why these utterances were made by the participants were unveiled through a semi-structured interview.

Participants

The 24 prospective ESL teachers from a higher education institution in Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines, participated in the study. The researcher's inclusion criteria were used to choose the participants purposefully: 1) must be enrolled for the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year; 2) must be able to generate an utterance in their L1 during class discussions; and 3) must be willing to take part.

Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data, the researcher observed and recorded the frequency of participants communicating using their L1 over five days, following a seating arrangement established at the beginning of the semester. The seating arrangement was established to easily record the utterances of the participants using L1 and the frequency of use.

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews. It was analyzed, interpreted, and presented using the thematic analysis framework established by Braun and Clarke (2022). A Focus Group Discussion was conducted to refine the collected data.

The gathering and analysis of the qualitative data was done in order to explain the occurrence of the utterances in L1 by the participants in a Teaching Grammar class.

Ethical Considerations

To collect relevant data, the researcher obtained authorization to conduct the study by submitting official request letter to the University. After the request was granted, the researcher collected quantitative and qualitative data. Before the interview, the participants were provided with a clear and concise explanation of the research's goals and objectives.

The participants were urged to provide honest answers to guarantee the reliability and validity of the study's findings and conclusions. They were also requested to furnish informed consent.

Though interview logs and audit trails were asked to be signed by the participants, their anonymity and the confidentiality of their answers were assured.

Results and Discussion

Frequency of Participants' L1 Usage in Teaching Grammar Class

Table 1. *Frequency Count of the Recorded L1 during the Teaching Grammar Class*

Participant	Words/Phrases	Frequency Count
1	• Sir, anya isurat ijay, sir? • Jay kwan strategy ngay sir? • Sir, nalipatan da ijay baba sir adiay IM na. • Duwa lang ti absent sir. • No sir, isa nalang sir yung activity. • Sir, kasdiay talaga iti istudyante.	6
2	• Yes sir, ngem haan kadi correct adiay? • Sir, isurat dituy?	2
3	• Paulit man sir, haan nga maaw-awatan nga usto adiay complex sentence sir. • Sir, mano nga simple sentence? • Sir, ilan ang conjunction na present idiay?	3
4	• Sir, atuy ngay assignment • Anya ata sir? Compound nga sentence?	2
5	• Sir, black dituy. • Haan kadi sir nga clause ata? • Sir, madi kadi nga two simple sentences?	3
6	• Sir, adiay noun, mabalin pangdescribe? • Inted da kanyak sir adiay copy iti module.	2
7	• Naglalaing talaga dagijay students sir. • Naglaka talaga nu words lang. • Adda sir adiay PPT iti approaches. • Sir, adda kenyak adiay answer key. • Madi nga na-recheck sir adiay PPT na.	5
8	• Haan ku ammu sir nu sino jay nangipass.	1
9	• Maraming ideas sir about grammar. • Sir madi clear adiay compound-complex. • Sir, pencil gamin sir jay inusar da. • Na? Anya answer number 4 sir?	4
10	• Sir, adiay diagramming ba? • Sir, kasatnu ngay ni *** awan answer na?	2
11	• Iaramidak sir ti sentence diyay?	1
12	• Han ku ammu • Sir, siyak agaramid sentence. • Sir, mabalin picturen? • Sir, adiay ba diagramming, same kay Kelog? • Sir, madik kinutkuti ata sir nga part iti sentence. • Sir, nalpas min sir adiay activity.	6
13	• Para mapatunayan sir yung class ng word.	1
14	• Sir, apay ta isu ti answer?	1
15	• Sir, madi gamin dapat nga one strategy lang. • Sir, idi nagcheck kami iti activity.	3
16	• Jay agsurat-surat ti likod sir	1
17	• Sir, duwa met jay intaag da apay mabalin diyay? • Last garud idi ammu da sir… • To you manen nga, apay sida… • Hindi sir, nakuha sir sa part na yan. • Madi sir, ipabulod na lang sir.	5
18	• Haan nga agkara – absent. • Adda met, kadwa mi isuna sir. • Haan kadi sir nga independent dayta? • Sir, isu kadi jay number 2.	4

20	• Sir, haan kami nagitayag dituy likod.	3
	• Sir, anya ikasta mi ditoy activity.	
	• Sir, andito po sa sentence 2 sir.	
21	• Madi ba mabalin iti puro deductive sir?	1
22	• Sir, i-collect min jay assignment.	1
23	• Sir, gamin ket adiay topic is mahirap	1
24	• Sir, apay ajay? Kasla wrong grammar.	1

Table 1 shows that the 24 participants used their L1 during their Teaching Grammar class. Participants 1 and 12 had the highest frequency of L1 usage, which is 6, followed by participants 7 and 17 with a frequency of 5 and participants 9 and 18 with a frequency count of 4.

Most participants conveyed their thoughts during classes in their preferred languages, such as Iloco and Tagalog. This observation emphasizes the significant influence or impact of L1 within the English learning environment, shedding light on the obstacles students encounter in fully embracing English as the primary communication medium.

Most participants' prevalent use of Iloco and Tagalog during English classes suggests a strong reliance on their L1 for expression. This reliance may stem from a sense of comfort and familiarity associated with using L1. However, it also indicates a potential challenge in transitioning to English as the predominant language for academic discourse.

Tubayqi (2021) revealed similar findings, stating that while teachers and students generally have positive attitudes toward using L1 in English classes, the results also show that L1 is used in English to support various classroom functions that facilitate teaching and learning.

Factors Affecting the Participants' Frequent Use of L1

This portion points to the factors affecting the utilization of L1 among prospective ESL teachers. Their responses were generally categorized into anxiety and limited vocabulary.

Theme 1: Anxiety. The first factor concerns the student's social anxiety. The participants reported that their hesitation to speak English was due to anxiety, fear of embarrassment, and lack of confidence.

Participant 7: "I am afraid, sir, to be judged by my classmates and you, sir."

Participant 15: "I am nervous, sir. I am not confident."

Participant 17: "I am afraid na mapahiya, sir." (I am afraid to get embarrassed.")

Participant 20: "Sir, I am not sure about my ideas. I am also afraid, sir."

Participant 24: "Sir, hindi po ako confident sa paggamit ng English, sir." (I am not confident in using English, sir.)

The participants' answers indicate a need for more certainty about their ability to communicate successfully using English, which results in reluctance. This lack of confidence may have been caused by various factors, including previous experiences or pressures from society or their academic environment.

Furthermore, participants may have been prevented from freely utilizing English due to the fear of making errors or being assessed poorly by others. This fear makes it difficult for them to communicate effectively in English.

A recent comprehensive study on language anxiety indicated that researchers must investigate this significant language acquisition barrier (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). The research analyzed the influence of language anxiety on language acquisition, categorizing its effects on students into five primary domains: academic, social, cognitive, affective, and emotional. Research indicates that students with linguistic anxiety perform inadequately in academic settings. Individuals engage in social interactions less often in their second language. Intense anxiety obstructs the transmission of information to learners' cognitive processing mechanisms, hence diminishing language learning. Anxiety influences other emotional elements, such as attitudes and self-confidence. Ultimately, language anxiety induces discomfort, apprehension, and forgetfulness (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019).

Theme 2: Limited Vocabulary. This factor is also one of the factors affecting the participants' utilization of L1, which pertains to issues related to language skills and competence.

Participant 1: "Sir, I have a limited vocabulary."

Participant 12: "Sir, hindi ko kasi alam yung word." (Sir, I do not know the word.)

Participant 14: "Sir, sometimes I speak using Iloco because I lack words."

Participant 21: "Sir, I don't know kasi the word nung sasabihin ko." (Sir, I do not know the word to use in what I would say.)

Participant 22: "Sir, I am unsure of my sentence because I lack vocabulary."

Participants stated that having a limited vocabulary impacts their usage of the L1 in expressing themselves. Because students cannot fully explain their views, so they often code-switch or use their L1 to share their ideas.

The finding emphasizes the need to expand students' vocabulary, particularly for future L2 teachers, who must be informed and adept at using language. The English curriculum may emphasize vocabulary-building strategies.

According to Neuman and Dwyer (2009), vocabulary is the set of words learners require to communicate; hence, they must practice using it well. Students should be allowed to repeatedly see and hear new words through various activities to increase their vocabulary.

Further, Erling et al. (2016) recommended that students keep vocabulary logs in separate notebooks where they may record new terms that can be shared among peers and utilized for homework assignments inside and outside the classroom.

Conclusions

Participants often use their L1 to articulate concepts, assuring clarity and comprehension. This preference arises from their profound knowledge and expertise in that language. Utilizing their L1 for conveying intricate or subtle information enhances communication, enabling teachers and students to interact more profoundly with the subject matter. Nonetheless, it may also signify a possible obstacle in establishing English as the primary language for academic discourse.

The research revealed two primary variables affecting students' use of their L1 in the Teaching Grammar class: anxiety and limited vocabulary. Anxiety, stemming from a deficiency in self-assurance and fear of embarrassment, is the predominant reason. Students also have difficulties in vocabulary learning, often reverting to their L1 for enhanced understanding of complex subjects. These elements influence their language acquisition experiences. While bilingualism can enhance cognitive skills, students face challenges meeting academic language demands.

Students often exhibit insufficient English competence, underscoring the need for focused initiatives. A nurturing classroom atmosphere, engaging activities, and culturally attuned pedagogical methods enhance confidence and language proficiency. Acknowledging linguistic variation and executing focused strategies promote aligning educational goals with real-world applications.

Curriculum developers and implementers may incorporate activities that enhance language proficiency. While learning the content is an essential part of the teaching-learning process, performance and real-life application of the content also need to be emphasized especially among prospective ESL teachers.

School administrators may provide facilities or learning materials for teachers to utilize in enhancing the language proficiency of the students, particularly the prospective ESL teachers.

Future researchers may engage in action research by using a strategy and intervention materials, enhancing the English curriculum while augmenting the existing body of information.

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