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USE OF L1 IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Foreign Languages have been taught through diverse methods and approaches. The teachers' role has been transformed from the center of the activity to the facilitator of learning. One of the main controversies which arises in this issue is the use of L1 while English as a Foreign or Second Language (L2) is facilitated. Some teachers rely heavily on the mother tongue and others completely proscribe it. The main aim of this work was to analyze the Ecuadorian instructors and learners' perceptions about the use of Spanish during the English classes in two Universities in Ecuador. In these cases the use of L1 during the instructions by the teachers was compared among the groups. In each group

the learners' perception about the use of Spanish was observed. One part of the population of the study consisted of three English Language Teachers as a Foreign Language. The groups of EFL learners, from Quito and Riobamba were characterized differently in several aspects like: proficiency level, age, social status. An observation checklist was completed by the researchers during all sessions. The instructors and learners who participated in this research were surveyed right after the last observed lesson. The outcome produced from this data collection and analysis will guide teachers to find a better answer about the controversies in the use of L1 during instruction of L2.

Keywords: Compared Pedagogy - English as a Foreign Language (EFL) - Teacher's role - L1



and L2 Acquisition - Class observation-Checklists

RESUMEN

Los idiomas extranjeros se han enseñado a través de diversos métodos y enfoques. El papel de los docentes se ha transformado de ser el centro de la actividad de enseñanza a facilitador del aprendizaje. Una de las principales controversias que surge en este tema es el uso de L1 mientras el inglés como idioma extranjero o segundo idioma (L2) se facilita a los estudiantes. Algunos maestros dependen en gran medida de la lengua materna y otros la proscriben por completo. El objetivo principal de este trabajo fue analizar las percepciones de los instructores ecuatorianos sobre el uso del español durante las clases de inglés en dos universidades en Ecuador. En estos casos, el uso de L1 por parte de los profesores durante la instrucción se comparó entre los grupos. En cada grupo se observó la percepción de los estudiantes sobre el uso del español. Una parte de la población del estudio consistió en tres profesores de lengua inglesa como lengua extranjera. Los grupos de estudiantes de EFL, de Quito y Riobamba se caracterizaron de manera diferente en varios aspectos como: nivel de competencia, edad, nivel social. Los investigadores completaron una ficha de observación durante todas las sesiones. Los instructores y estudiantes que participaron en esta investigación fueron encuestados inmediatamente después de la última lección observada. El resultado producido a partir de esta recopilación y análisis de datos guiará a los maestros a encontrar una mejor respuesta sobre las controversias en el uso de L1 durante la instrucción de L2.

1. Palabras clave: - Pedagogía comparada - Inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) - Rol del profesor - L1 y L2 Adquisición - Observación de clase - Listas de verificación.

1. INTRODUCTION

The last century has moved forward in all aspects of human development. Those changes had affected human interaction, among the most observables: transportation, technology, and communications as well as education. It has moved through different learning theories, from behaviorist to social constructivist ones. As Celce-Murcia (2001) describes: "The field of second (or foreign) language teaching has undergone many fluctuations and shifts over the years". (p. 3).

Foreign Languages have been taught through diverse methods and approaches, which have been sustained in several theoretical frameworks and forms of learning. Widdowson (1990), mentioned that "classroom activities are referred to theoretical principles of one sort or another", (p.1). It means that it does not matter which is the purpose of the program (ESL/EFL) there always be a method or approach underneath it. Celce-Murcia suggests that "The teacher will be in a position to select the most useful techniques or principles and to design a productive course of study by drawing from available approaches, syllabus types, and existing research findings" (1990, p.3).

This sets the cornerstone of this endeavor: Action Research for the Ecuadorian English Teaching Improvement. Teachers have to be self-reflective actors in education, according to Lucey (2003) "Most teachers will conduct a bit of personal, class-based research at some point. It will rarely be formally recognized, you will hardly ever get allocated time to complete it and it will almost never reach the light of day and be published".

Jhonston (1999) asserts that "over the last 10 or 15 years, it has become increasingly common for teachers to conduct investigations of their own classrooms and to present their investiga-



tions at conferences and in publications”(p. 558). Thus, teachers should assume this task as part of their role of social actors. In this way researcher teachers will provide evidence for their daily practice.

The role of the teacher has also been transformed from the center of the activity to the facilitator of learning. One of the main issues which arises at this point, is the use of L1 as facilitator of English as a Foreign or Second Language (L2). In relation to this aspect it has been mentioned that “The history of methodology has gone through drastic changes: there have been periods during which only the pupils’ native language was spoken in the classroom (the grammar translation method) and periods where the native language was completely banned from the classroom (the direct method)”. (Dubin & Olshtain, 1977, p. 6). Beyond the periods of transformation in the application of the different methods, this research paper will describe the use of the mother tongue (L1) under the current situation of language learning, the inclusion of the use of technology into blended learning approaches and the daily eclectic practice that teachers have applied.

A method or approach like SDAIE (Specifically Designed Academic Instruction in English), which primary focus is to achieve concept and skill attainment (literature, history, science, math, etc.) that opposes to ELD (English Language Development) methods which primary focus is language development (sentence structure, grammar, & usage) through the use of L1 during instruction in an ELL environment, is also known as SIOP. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol is a set of teaching strategies, designed for teachers of academic content, that lower the linguistic demand of the lesson without compromising the integrity or rigor of the subject matter. It was originally designed for content and classroom teachers who teach in English (New Teacher Center, 2010).

Having a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of these two main currents, this action research work would inform adequate teaching practice to benefit language learners in Ecuador. This qualitative study will deepen insights into the use of L1 in the Ecuadorian context and will help teachers create a better learning environment which could balance the use of L1 and L2 in the appropriate amount. This is described as follows: “Teachers need to be retooled [...] to account for learners learning in ways that minimize their focus on development of their English proficiency and maximize their learning potential” (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999, p. 269). Krashen provides extended information about this: “Early speech moreover, is typically not grammatical accurate. Accuracy develops over time as the acquirer hears and understands more input” (1987, p. 22). Then the focus of this approach could be to put emphasis on use of language (fluency) rather than the correctness (accuracy) of it. Thus the controversies could emerge.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are Ecuadorian learners’ perceptions about the use of Spanish during the English classes in the district X in Quito?

2.1 Subquestions:

What is the role of the mother tongue during English learning as a foreign language?

In which ways do teachers use L1 in a productive way to facilitate learning?

Is it a real necessity for true beginner learners to use L1 in classes?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Theory of Language Learning

Two major fields can be clearly identified in English Language Learning. The first one is English as a Second Language (ESL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In both fields many theories, approaches, methods and hypothesis



have been developed and studied. This research has chosen the most relevant and pertinent ones, which will constitute its theoretical framework. To understand the implication of the differences between ESL and EFL environments, Freeman & Freeman (1998) state that one typical role of ESL is to serve as the primary language for most people living in countries like USA, England, Canada, [...] in countries where English is not a primary language of most people EFL is taught (p. 4). It means that the EFL environment where learners are exposed to English only in the classroom and there is no social use of English.

The next concept to be analyzed is the Input Hypothesis ($i + 1$) which states that: "language is acquired when a structure is a bit beyond the current level of competence, and this is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information" (Krashen, 1987, p. 21). Complementing this hypothesis, the context created by teachers, demand of the use of L2, to create a real language use environment, and the need of extra-linguistic information or nonverbal cues, which is the tone of voice or facial expression used when speaking to convey a more powerful message than actual words. (University of Minnesota, 2012). Thus the use of L2 even from the initial stages can be necessary.

Emphasizing the previous condition, The First Language Rule Hypothesis (L1 Rule) states that: "performers who are asked to produce before they are ready will fall back on first language rule, that is, they will use syntactic rules of their first language while speaking the second language" (Newark, 1966 in Krashen, 1987, p. 27). Cummins adds that the student acquires concepts most readily in their native or first language and then understands them in their second language (Cummins, 1996, 1984, 1981 in Freeman & Freeman, 1998, p. 208). Those basic concepts in EFL are also called Metalanguage (language about language). Learning to use new metalan-

guage is a skill in itself that needs to be taught, but to be meaningful, the learning of metalanguage needs to be situated in instructional contexts where it resonates with and helps support content goals (Schleppegrell, 2013, p. 158).

3.2 The Ecuadorian Context for Language Learning

The following concept to be considered in this study has to do with the approaches and methods applied in the Ecuadorian context. Richards (2001) describes an Approach as: "a set of beliefs and principles that can be used as the basis for teaching a language" (p. 244) and a method as: "a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning" (p. 245).

The Ecuadorian National Curriculum for English as a Foreign Language prescribes that the Communicative Approach (CLT) is currently the most recognized, accepted norm in the field of language teaching and learning worldwide because it comprises a theoretically well-informed set of principles about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching (Ministerio de Educacion del Ecuador, 2012).

3.3 Intrinsic Factors of EFL Learning

The subsequent elements to be considered as the background of this study have to do with intrinsic factors of the learners. Motivation at the initial stages of language learning could be connected with the use of L1. The learners might feel free to express their concerns about the initial contact with English, especially if they have had no any prior exposure to it. According to Auerbach: "starting the lesson using L1, provides a sense of security which validates the prior experiences of the learners" (1993, p. 9). Hopkins supports this point of view stating that "the sense of our identity as individuals is intrinsically joint to our mother tongue" (1988, p. 3).



Freeman & Freeman (1998) establishes that in EFL context, learners learning English don't lose their native language [...], as we observed in parts of South America, for children to receive all their schooling in English and still speak and understand their native language. However, some learners don't learn to read and write easily in English in these EFL contexts, and they may fail to acquire academic Spanish. Their Spanish literacy development may be limited by the early English immersion. This can be one of the main reasons for considering English as a mandatory subject to be taught just in the public high schools when the literacy of the learner in his/her native language is already advanced, and it is not an official subject in primary schools or basic education where learners need to develop literacy skills in Spanish yet.

All the aspects mentioned above remark the dilemma and importance of the use of L1 in an EFL learning environment. Thus the learning context and the role of teachers and learners have to be described in terms of their connection with the Ecuadorian reality. "As the common sense assumption lessons should take place in English to facilitate the acquisition of English, while the principle for success determines that lessons should support learners' first language and cultures so teachers can draw on and develop learners' strengths" (Freeman & Freeman, 1998, p. xvi).

3.4 The English Language Teacher

Most of the time, the human side of teachers is not considered as a decisive element in the learning process. The teacher is the first model of language use in an EFL environment. This modelling can be native or non-native. Medgers (2001) describes the native English-speaking teacher (NEST) as a person, who was born, educated, and exposed to language in an English-speaking community, and is able to shows levels of proficiency, self-confidence, cultural affilia-

tion, self-identification with this language. While the non-native English-speaking teacher (non-NEST) is described as the person whose mother language is any other different than English, works in an EFL environment; whose learners are monolingual groups of learners, and speaks the same native language as his or her learners. The quantity and quality of L1 and L2, produced by teachers in initial stages and the situations in which they use them, have to be observed. Nevertheless, as it was mentioned before it also depends on the approach and method, and the language stage development. All those factors might determine the amount of language produced by the teachers.

3.5 Teachers' Characteristics

Medgyes (2000) suggests that non-NEST in an EFL environment, are able to provide a better language model for their learners and may be then able to teach language-learning strategies more effectively. Due to their background, they can supply more information about the English language and be better able to anticipate and prevent language difficulties that their learners might have. It was also reported that non-NEST tend to be more sensitive to their learners and recognize the benefit from their own personal ability to use the mother tongue of their learners. The level of language proficiency is also an important feature which might determine the amount of English used in classes.

3.6 Teachers Roles

Richards & Rodgers (2001) state that the teacher's role is to follow the method and apply it precisely according to the rules. Then the role of the teacher according to the Communicative Approach must be to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts; to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group.



These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher, as an organizer of resources and as a resource himself, as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities. A third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities. (Breen & Candlin, 1980). Another teacher's role is to avoid the fossilization of mistakes on the learner (Azar, 2012). Although individual teachers can make a real difference for learners, the best results come when teachers work in programs suited to the context and student's needs, integrating as many members of the educational community to participate actively in the design of the program (Freeman & Freeman, 1998, p. 232).

3.7 Teacher Talking Time

It seems that the amount and type of talk L2 teachers do in their classrooms are largely dependent on both the specific goals of the syllabus adopted and their pedagogical principles. Teacher-talk is useful when certain conditions are met (It is broken into sense groups, it is simplified but not unnatural, it is more redundant than ordinary speech, words and structures are naturally repeated or re-cycled at regular intervals, it is broken into short paragraph segments to encourage or invite learners to interrupt, comment and ask questions) and are related to verbal factors (Power, 2014).

In a study conducted by Schweers in Puerto Rico with a population of Spanish, 88.7% of the learners felt that Spanish should be used in English classes. All of the teachers reported using Spanish to some degree. Approximately 99% of the learners responded that they like their teachers to use only English in the classroom. 86% percent of learners would like Spanish used to explain difficult concepts. Only 22% of teachers saw this as an appropriate use. Learners also re-

sponded higher than teachers on uses of Spanish for: helping learners feel more comfortable and confident, checking comprehension, and defining new vocabulary items. Neither learners nor teachers saw a use for the L1 in testing. (Schweers, 2003).

Mattioli (2004) about the use of L1 in an EFL environment concluded that the EFL classroom context has limits, and to fight against them is useless. A teacher can instead work shape, refine, and exploit them for her purposes to help learners grow and progress in their acquisition of a new language. Thus, English teachers need to be oriented about the right amount, the purposes, the strategies and importance of using L1 in EFL environments in Ecuador.

3.8 Learner-centered instruction

As part of the strategies contained in the CLT Approach. The concept of Learner-centered instruction (LCI) applies to curricula as well as to specific techniques. LCI includes techniques that focus on or account for learners' needs, styles, and goals; it gives some control to the student (group work); it allows student creativity and innovation; and, enhance a student's sense of competence and self-worth. It can be contrasted with teacher-centered instruction (TCI). Then the amount of Spanish used by the instructors might go in contradiction to this principle.

The controversy about the usefulness or damage that the use of L1 can cause during L2 acquisition is matter of this research. In the Ecuadorian context there have been developed any kind of research which provided informed decision or guidelines to English teachers. This is an ideal moment to start this academic endeavor.

4 METHODOLOGY

This research was aimed to analyze the perception that Ecuadorian learners have about



the teacher's use of Spanish during their English classes as a foreign language. According to Wiersna & Jurs (2008): "The selection of methods and procedures is the heart of a research proposal. The activities must be very well detailed described, and the continuity must be evident" (p. 409). This has led to the researcher to determine the type of research to be developed. This study was a qualitative multiple case study design Gay, Mills & Arasian (2012) describe this method as the one in which researchers focus on a unit of study known as a bounded system. This multiple case study design by definition does not involve critical, unusual or revelatory cases. Due to its nature, this study will involve both the teacher and the learners. In this case the use of L1 during the instructions by the teachers will be compared among three groups. In each group the learners' perception about the use of Spanish will be observed and surveyed.

Thus, one part of the population of the study to be observed consisted of three English Language Teachers as a Foreign Language, they are Ecuadorian non-native teachers of English holding a BA in Teaching English, and serving as instructors in a Public and Private Universities; also a survey was applied to sixty instructors from the Language Center at ESPOCH and Universidad Catolica in an aleatory random way. Primarily the approach developed by the instructors is the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) during the lessons that were observed for this investigation.

Besides, three native spanish-speaking groups of EFL learners, from Quito and Riobamba but characterized differently in several aspects like: proficiency level, age, major; will comprise the other part of the population. Each group consist of 25 learners attending the Universidad Catolica and the Escuela Politecnica del Chimborazo. These were mixed-abilities and medium-size groups. The groups meet on a daily basis during weekdays two hours a day. Each class lasts 60

minutes. The group will be identified as group A, B, and C which are at intermediate level proficiency on average; Furthermore, the first group is rather heterogeneous as regards age and literacy level. Additionally, another difference that appears to be worth pointing out is that group B study in the morning and group A and C in the afternoons. In terms of economic background, the groups will be evenly balanced: there are members of the working-class and middle-class in both groups. Nevertheless, the facilities in both Universities varies drastically.

A multiple case study enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases. The goal is to replicate findings of the use of L1 across the groups. Because comparisons will be drawn, it is imperative that the groups are chosen carefully so that the researcher can predict similar results across cases, or predict contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2003). Then, this multiple case study can be described as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. (Gay et al., 2012). According to Robson (1993), it is a common misconception, that multiple case studies are conducted with the purpose of gathering sample for generalization. Instead the goal is to get material for the analytical generalization. Therefore this study will be under those considerations.

The researchers' role was as nonparticipant observers. Gay et al., (2012) stated: "the nonparticipant observer is not directly involved in the situation being observed [...] the researcher observes and records behaviors but does not interact or participate in the life of the setting under study" (p. 382). Nonparticipant observers are less intrusive and less likely to become actively involved with participants. The researchers observed the interaction among teachers and learners during three consecutive lessons, mainly focused on the use of L1 during the development of the lessons. Besides, a survey was applied to learners and teachers; also in order



to capture the amount of talk done in the two classrooms, a digital sound recorder application in a tablet will be used. The amount of talk will be afterwards timed with another application the stopwatch. Three consecutive sessions will be recorded with each group.

An observation checklist template (see appendix A) also was completed by the researchers during all sessions. Cook cited in Yount (2006) describes a checklist as: "An observational checklist is a structure for observation, and allows observers to record behaviors during sessions quickly, accurately, and with minimal interviewer effect on behaviors". In this checklist, the main stages and activities developed by the instructors will be registered. (p. 1)

Each teacher oral interaction during the lessons was coded according to the stage it has been produced. A language lesson commonly has three stages: introduction, rehearsal, and closing. These stages have a direct relation with the presentation, practice, production PPP model, in which there are three stages: first, the teacher presents the target language; then, learners practice the new language items; and finally they use their own ideas to talk about themselves. During these stages the amount of oral language used by the instructor will be observed and measured in percentages. This teacher oral interaction can be either in Spanish (L1) or in English (L2).

The learners' oral production whether that would be for answering the teacher's questions or to express individual needs to the instructor, was observed too (see appendix 1). The use of L1 among learners was not considered during the observation.

The teachers (appendix B) and learners (appendix C) who participate in this research will be surveyed right after the last observed lesson. The data collected in this survey will be coded in rela-

tion to the stages of the lessons delivered. The amount of L1 spoken during each lesson will be quantified in percentages of time (appendix D). Descriptive statistic tools were used. The mean, and media were statistically obtained. Those results were compared in tables (appendix D) and presented in histograms.

Trustworthiness was established by the criteria of credibility and confirmability by the triangulation strategy among the data obtained from checklist, the teachers' survey and the learners' survey. The transferability will be done through the detailed description of the context to make judgments about fit with other context.

The outcome produced from this data collection and analysis might guide teachers to find a better answer about the controversies in the use of L1 during instruction of L2. Developing this multiple case study will permit to share findings related to the perception on learners and preference of non-NEST teachers on the use of L1 during instruction of L2 in Ecuador, and this will contribute to the improvement of our educational system.

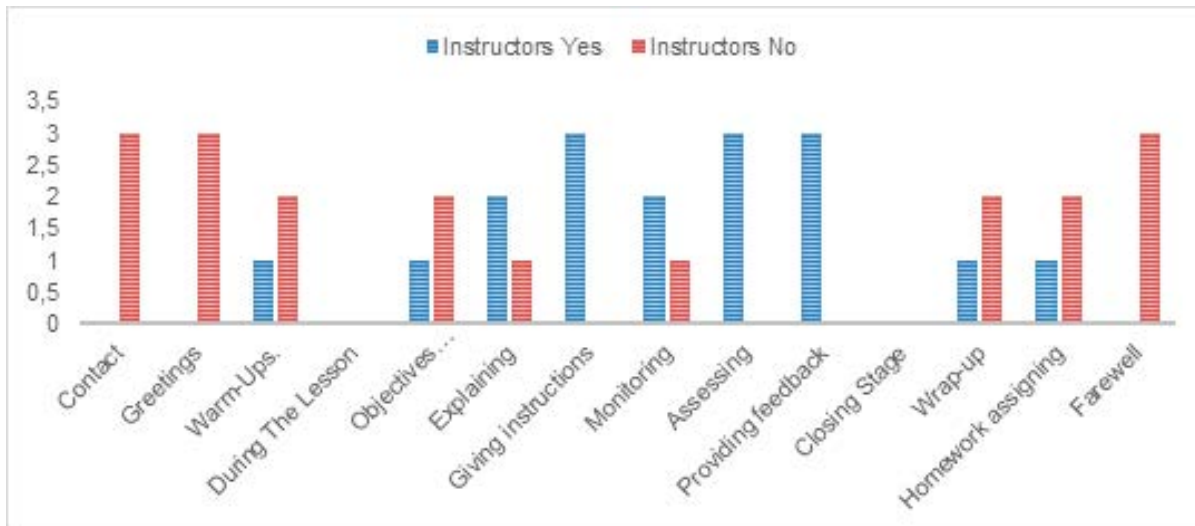
4.1 Results

As final stage of the research and the data collected, the researchers could turn their attention to analyzing the results. This analysis was focused on answering two questions. The first is when and why teachers and learners use their L1 during the instruction process. The second is whether the use of L1 in the classroom helped students to improve their learning regardless the prohibition of L1 use. Nevertheless, it is fair to categorize these conclusions as positive, in terms of validating the research aim. Results showed that the use of L1 in the classroom does not seem to hinder the learning of an L2, and in fact seems to facilitate it in some of the lesson stages. Results also showed that L2 only can help learning and lead to improvements. However, upon closer examination there seems to



be evidence that the use of L1 in the classroom does actually help learning and lead to more improvement among the students than L2 only.

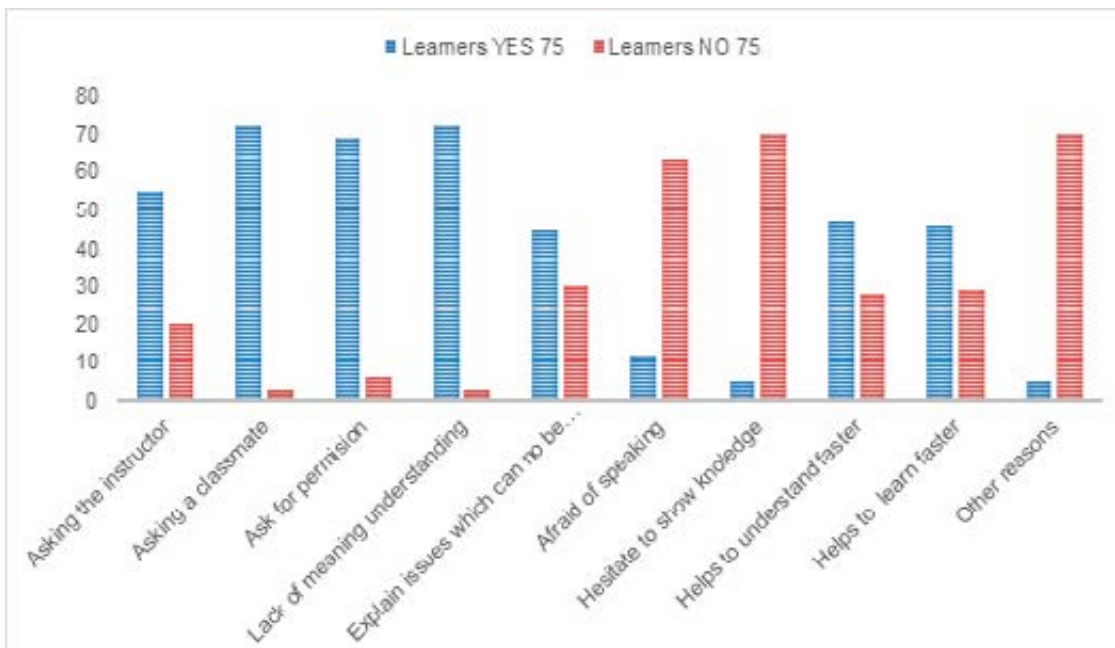
CHART N°1 TEACHERS L1 USE DURING INSTRUCTION OF L2



Source: Research Instruments

As the chart shows while assessing and providing feedback is the highest use of L2 by instructors the initial stage and the final activities are the ones in which instructors use their L1 as top (Chart 1).

CHART N° 2 STUDENTS L1 USE DURING INSTRUCTION OF L2



Source: Research Instruments



This chart presented the asking to a classmate moment and the lack of understanding as the highest use of L1 by learners, whereas being afraid of speaking and the hesitation of knowledge as the lowest use of L2 by learners (Chart 2).

5. FINDINGS

To conclude, it is pertinent to mention that due to the nature of the study, it was done in different contexts (students' performance level mainly) which leads to say that according to the progress of students in each level the use of L1 could be reduced, it means that during the adaptation stage in the contact or initial levels the use of L1 is necessary, but unluckily sometimes its use is abused by learners and instructors. While the learners' performance increases the use of L1 decreases. The final idea might be that the higher level the learner reaches the lowest the use of L1 is observed.

It is a reality that more research has to be developed to really know the positive or negative effects that the limited and correctly controlled use of L1 in L2 environments can have on the exposure of students to the latter. Finally the question is if this study advocates a greater use of L1 in the English as a second language classroom or as a foreign language. It could be considered that this is a matter that each teacher must decide for him/herself.

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Appendix A

Checklist for the Use of Spanish in an English as Foreign Language Class

Class: _____ Teacher: _____ Period of observation: _____ to _____

Category	Teacher		Learners		Comments
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Initial Activities					
Contact					
Greetings					
Warm-Ups.					
During The Lesson					
Objectives Communication					
Explaining					
Giving instructions					
Monitoring					
Assessing					
Providing feedback					
Closing Stage					
Wrap-up					
Homework assigning					
Farewell					



Appendix B

SURVEY FOR TEACHERS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1- Read carefully every aspect presented in the following survey and mark with an X the best answer according with your personal opinion.

2. For responding every questions use the following scale:

Always = (4) = A Usually = (3) = U Sometimes = (2) = S Never = (1) = N

3. Answer the survey honestly, since the results will be valuable for educational purposes of this research.

ITEMS	ASPECTS	ANSWERS			
		A (4)	U (3)	S (2)	N (1)
1	The communicative approach is well developed in my lessons				
2	Lessons I teach are student centered				
3	Speaking is the most useful skill developed in my classes				
4	I feel the necessity of using Spanish during the instruction provided to your learners				
5	My learners require the use of Spanish during instruction				
6	There are policies that forces me to speak only in English to my learners				
7	My learners complain about the use of Spanish during the instruction				
8	Parents complain about the use of Spanish during instruction				
9	There is a school policy that promotes the use of English outside the classroom.				



Appendix C

SURVEY FOR LEARNERS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1- Read carefully every aspect presented in the following survey and mark with an X the best answer according with your personal opinion.

2. For responding every questions use the following scale:

Always = (4) = A Usually = (3) = U Sometimes = (2) = S Never = (1) = N

3. Answer the survey honestly, since the results will be valuable for educational purposes of this research.

ITEMS	ASPECTS	ANSWERS			
		A (4)	U (3)	S (2)	N (1)
1	I learn how to communicate in English during my English lessons				
2	I participate actively during my English classes				
3	I speak English in every lesson				
4	I need my teacher to speak Spanish to me				
5	I ask my teacher to use Spanish during classes				
6	I am forced to speak only in English in classes				
7	Your classmates complain about speaking Spanish in classes				
8	Parents have complain about speaking Spanish in classes				
9	There is a school policy that promotes the use of English outside the classroom				



Appendix D

Data analysis chart. Use of Spanish during the English class

Class and Instructor	Teacher's use of L1						Learners' use of L1					
	Lesson 1		Lesson 2		Lesson 3		Lesson 1		Lesson 2		Lesson 3	
	Time in minutes	%	Time in minutes	%	Time in minutes	%	Time in minutes	%	Time in minutes	%	Time in minutes	%
Class A												
Class B												
Class C												
X												