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ONLY ENGLISH POLICY IN EFL CLASSES

**Date of Product:** 05.11.2012

**Place the study performed:** Gaziantep

# **USING L1 TO ENHANCE THE GRAMMAR LEARNING AND HAVING ONLY ENGLISH POLICY IN EFL CLASSES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to determine the differences of grammar learning, if any, between the EFL classes in which native language (L1) is sometimes used and only target language (L2) is used.

Learning language has always been a challenging process for Turkish students. Although grammar learning is easier than learning how to speak and pronounce the words, Turkish students may come across some difficulties while trying to get the required knowledge in the classes. Hearing only English in a class might be very disturbing for students because unlike the U.S.A, in Turkiye students do not need to use their target language outside the classroom. In other countries like Great Britain and the United States, learners come across much English and that makes learning language easier whereas in Turkey students are exposed to only mother language outside the classroom.

Throughout the world, there have been many discussions about using only English in the EFL classrooms. It seems that beliefs supporting both ways of teaching grammar do not outnumber each other. For the L2 usage, Cook (2001) asserts that the amount of exposure to the L1 is directly proportional to the proficiency students develop in the given language. That is the more they are exposed to the L1, the faster they will acquire it. Based on this idea, in one of the grammar classes at one of the universities in Turkey, “only English” policy is strictly used to enhance the learning

of the students. In addition, a foreign student takes part in that class other than 14 Turkish students, so it has been impossible and unethical to use L1. On contrary to this class, using L1 is sometimes possible in the other grammar class, especially when students have difficulty to understand the meaning of a word, there is a need for comparative grammar and promoting a positive affective environment for learning is required. In both cases, students know that using target language is more important in EFL classes.

The idea that the use of a student's native language in the classroom can facilitate acquisition of the target language is also supported in considerable amount of literature. Cook (1992), for example reminds that learners cannot simply shut down their knowledge of one language when using the other. That means despite some criticism, using L1 should also be possible to attract the attention of the students. As it has been observed from the L1 used classes, positive and encouraging environment has a tendency to increase unlike the first only English class. That's because students of that class can get the words and some rules in a simpler way than the first class. Another supporter of L1 usage, Macias and Kephart (2009) asserts that using the L1 provides an efficient and accurate means for analyzing semantic features of words and their appropriate use in diverse contexts in the second or foreign language.

In terms of understanding the grammar points, students always want to know every word in the paragraphs and texts, so giving them the words in L1 also helps the teacher to keep the positive mood of students by helping them. Likewise, Auerbach (1993) advocates the use of L1 in adult EFL classrooms for multiple purposes, such as establishing classroom routines, explaining vocabulary, generating themes for lessons, and enhancing comprehension. Also, Macias and Kephart (2009) are in favor of using L1 for the multiple purposes above. Using a strict "only English" policy is sometimes

criticized like Brooks and Donato (1994) whose study shows that some use of the L1 during L2 interaction is a normal psycholinguistic process that facilitates L2 production. Moreover, it is asserted that using L1 allows the learners both to initiate and keep verbal interaction with one another (p. 268). Having been observed for some time, two classes passed six weeks with two different teaching styles. In spite of the criticism and request coming from the students in the first class, using “only English” policy has not been given up or intervened.

### **The Question of the Study**

Neither of the two beliefs about using the L1 is proven to be true or valid. In essence, both of the ways have been used for a long time. Teachers are choosing the best ways congruent to their classes. However, we need the answer if this language preference makes any changes in terms of learning for students. For this reason, the case study of the effect of using L1 in EFL grammar classes attempted to answer these questions:

1. Does using only target language (L2) help students learn the grammar of second language?
2. Is it effective to use mother language (L1) in the grammar classes?

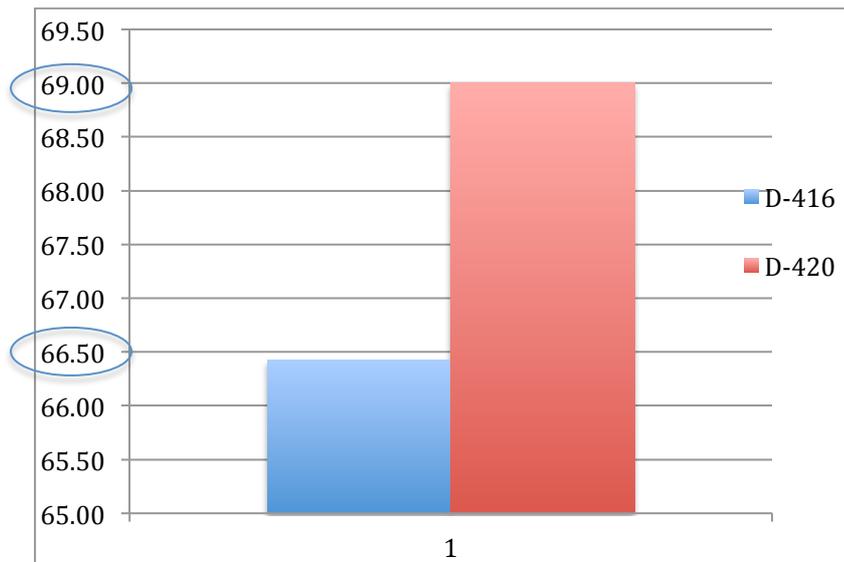
### **METHODOLOGY**

Participants were 42 prep year students from one of the universities in Turkey. They have been studying English for 9 months, and now they are in level D that is equal to B1 or B2 in CEFR. Study was committed to students in level D which is still in progress. In the experimental group, which is first class, no mother language, Turkish was used. In the other class that is comparison group, some usage of mother

language (L1) was seen in the class. After the 6 hours of grammar class with the topic of gerund- infinitives, the students were given a test, which consists of 20 questions. The first 15 questions are about the topic of gerund- infinitives, but the last 5 were modals to make sure the study is more reliable. All the verbs and structures were the ones mentioned in the class, so the chance for the students to remember their background information from other classes or past studies is lowered. To prevent the luck factor, the students were told to leave the questions blank if they did not know the answer. As guessing is always a helpful way for students, they were informed about the scoring before the test was implemented. In order to achieve the aim above, no scoring was used in this test. Also, the students were convinced to leave the questions they do not know unanswered because scoring is an encouraging and forcing factor for students. Thus, guessing factor was omitted with the help of non-scoring. T-test was used to define the difference between two classes.

## **FINDINGS**

In terms of comparing the two EFL classes, results show that two classes are nearly same in learning grammar. The percentage of the first class was 69% that is the average and normal score for a level D class. Percentage of 66.50 may seem less, but the difference was only 2.50 point between the classes.



*Table 1: Averages of two EFL classes*

Two averages above show the little difference between the classes. D-416 is the class where L1 is sometimes used to help the students learning. In D-420, however, L1 has never been used. Although there is little difference between the classes, it would not be right to say that it does not have any significance.

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
VAR00001	14	66,4286	21,52178	5,75194
VAR00002	15	69,0000	23,39108	6,03955

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
VAR00001	11,549	13	,000	66,42857	54,0023	78,8549
VAR00002	11,425	14	,000	69,00000	56,0464	81,9536

One-Sample t-test statistics above shows the results of the two EFL grammar classes. It is seen that there is not a big difference between the classes; however, leastwise we might talk about a difference.

## CONCLUSION

Teaching grammar in one of the EFL classes require so many responsibilities both for the teacher and the students, nevertheless choosing which way to use in the class is still an unanswered question for teachers. In this study, the results show that the success of the students is not directly related to the teaching style. Using L1 in the class and having an “only English” policy are two different approaches to the teaching styles in the educational world. In addition to that requirements and effects of these two styles are also different from each other. The students in both groups have nearly gotten the same scores. Using L2 may seem a little more effective and important than using L1 in class. However, given the data acquired from the study, it can be clearly stated that we cannot define the best way to teach EFL out of these two ways. The answer for the question is beyond of this study, and much more needs to be done to find an answer for it.

There may have been some other factors affecting the result of this study such as the time of the study and other classes. The study was conducted at the last term of the prep school of one of the universities in Turkey. After a long period of challenge, students might have learnt the required knowledge without the help of the grammar class. Furthermore, the last term and the season of the year may have affected the students in a negative way. To prevent this problem, it would be essential to keep the study going throughout the year with many classes. As it is mentioned here, other classes may have had an impact on the grammar classes. For example, reading and writing classes had the chance to support the students lack of knowledge, so while asking the grammar questions, a broader range of topics ought to be chosen.

Increasing the rate of reliability of this study is underlying in the broadening the scope of the study with many classes and a long term. By doing that the

weaknesses of the study would be vanished. However hard the study is, it is still quiet interesting and significant to find the answer about these two teaching styles. Language education has been in the need of this question for years, and with so many educators and researchers, it should not take so long to lighten the darkness of laxity.

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