The Use of L1/ L2 in EFL Classroom in Multilingual Context: Learners Perspective

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Abstract

The study aims to inspect the perceptions of learners about the use of L1/L2 in EFL classroom as a useful strategy in the multilingual context of Quetta, Balochistan. The participants of the research were undergraduate EFL learners having multilingual backgrounds. Mixed method was used for data collection. For analysis of the data, descriptive statistics and thematic statistics were used. The findings of the study revealed that the use of L1/L2 in EFL classroom in a multilingual context is a useful strategy for language learning, as it helps the learners in understanding the content, concepts, and terminologies of target language. The results revealed that in the globalized world, switching from the target language to L1 or regional languages, especially in a multilingual and multicultural classroom, is inevitable. The findings of the study suggested that L1 in EFL classroom should not be prohibited if it is used according to classroom requirement.

Key Words: L1, L2, EFL, Translanguaging, Code-switching, Bilingual, Multilingual.

1. Introduction

In bilingual/multilingual societies, switching from one language to another language is a common occurrence. To overcome communication barriers, people switch between their first language (L1) and second language (L2) and vise-versa (Nangsih & Rose, 2018). Switching from one language to another language in the same and single discourse is termed as code-switching (Macaro, 2005). In such bilingual/multilingual communities, code-switching is not only practiced outside the classroom but also in educational institutions inside language learning classrooms (Mushtaq & Rabbani, 2016). Similarly, due to multilingual and multicultural classroom context, switching does not occur from one language to another language only. Sometimes, the learners practice integrated use of the languages and their full linguistics repertoire, which is known as translanguaging (Wei, 2018). Translanguaging refers to deliberately switching from language of learning to language of input (García & Wei, 2014).Translanguaging in EFL classroom has been practiced as a language teaching and learning strategy to help the learners to practice their language repertoire completely without any restrictions (García & Kleyn 2016; Wei 2018).

Pakistan is also a polyglot country, where more than 67 languages are spoken (Rehman, 2003; Rasool& Winke, 2019). Rahman (2003) in his study mentions that Urdu, Punjabi, Balochi, Pashto, Brahvi, and Sindhiare major spoken languages of Pakistan. On the contrary, the education system of the country is bilingual, where in Urdu along with English is used as language of interaction and instruction in educational institutions.

Therefore, switching is mostly from English to Urdu in the language learning classroom. However, in a multilingual situation, switching to local languages is also unavoidable. As Pakistanis a multilingual country, English is not learned as a second language but as a foreign language. It is because most of the learners can speak more than two languages with their mother tongue as L1 and Urdu as native and L2.

Nevertheless, there is a long debate among researchers on the use of L1in L2 classroom. In the past, grammar translation method was used in L2 or EFL classroom in which the language learners and teachers used to think in their first language and tried to translate their ideas to the second language. This method was criticized by many researchers. They argued that in language learning classes, main focus should be on the target language. Nonetheless, the practice has again become the topic of argument, who now believe that the use of L1 in ESL /EFL classroom or the practice of code-switching should not be discouraged (Shabir, 2017). Hence, there remains confusion whether or not L1should be practiced in ESL/ EFL classroom. In this regard, many studies were reviewed and conducted in Pakistan. However, they missed to inspect the perception of the language learners concerning the practice of L1/L2in EFL classroom in the multilingual context of Quetta, Balochistan. It is, therefore, imperative to know the perceptions of the learners about the switching of L1/L2 in EFL classroom and its effects. Hence, the focus of this study is to understand the perceptions of undergraduate EFL learners about the practice of first and second languages (L1and L2) in multilingual classrooms of different colleges and universities of Quetta, Balochistan.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to examine the effects of L1/L2use in EFL classroom in the multilingual context of Quetta, Balochistan. The study also aims to know the perceptions of the learners about language switching in EFL classroom.

1.3 Research Questions
Q 1. What is the perception of learners about the use of L1/L2 in EFL classroom?
Q 2. What are the effects of language switching in EFL classroom in a multilingual context?

2. Literature Review

The practice of L1/L2 in foreign language learning classes is the focus of study of many researchers. The studies reveal that the practice of inter-language or shifting between languages during conversation plays a vital role in the learning process of a foreign language. In this regard, Shabir (2017) claims that the usage of L1 in L2 classroom cannot be neglected completely, because L1 supports in L2 or EFL learning process, such as explaining grammar concepts, avoiding communication breakdown, and managing classroom.

To know the value of L1 in L2 classroom, about 44% of recent studies were conducted on the attitudes and perceptions of the learners and teachers in which almost 58% inclined to focus on voices of learners. In these studies, it was explored that majority of the students and language instructors acknowledged the importance of L1 in learning of L2 (Liu & Zeng, 2015; Tsagari & Diakou, 2015; Yao, 2011).

A study conducted by Ford (2009) at Waseda University Japan to know the perception of teachers concerning the use of L1 by teachers and students in L2 classroom. Semi-structured interview was conducted with ten native-speakers EFL teachers. The result indicated that 9 out of 10 teachers favored 'English only' policy in L2 classroom by teachers. However, in case of students switching between L1 in L2 classroom, they were a little flexible. They elaborated that in language learning classroom, attention should be given to the language of learning, and if L1 in L2 classroom was used, learners' attention would be deviated from the target language. This study was limited to one university of Japan, and used qualitative approach for data collection. The researcher suggested that the future researchers can study the use of L1 in L2 classroom in a broader perspective using classroom observation, teachers and student journals, interviews, and questionnaires.

Favoring the usage of L1 in EFL classroom, a research took place in a Yemeni university. Respondents of the research were 45 Yemeni students studying English as a foreign language. Mixed method approach was used for data collection. Their first language was Arabic. All the learners favored code-switching from English to Arabic and vise-versa. They stated that the practice of L1 in EFL classroom acted as a functional strategy and was used for several purposes, such as giving explanations and translating difficult words or concepts. It was concluded that language switching facilitated the EFL learners and maximized their engagement in classroom. However, they stated that learners should not excessively depend on the speaking of L1 in EFL learning (Bhooth, et al. 2014).

Similarly, another study wasled by Alsheri (2017) at King Abdul Aziz University of Saudi Arabia. The focus of this study was to explore the behavior of EFL teachers towards L1 practice in L2 classroom. Using mixed method, data was collected from 104 EFL teachers, belonging to Pakistan, India and USA. The results revealed

that almost all the participants had optimistic attitude towards the use of L1 in L2 classroom. The teachers stated that they used L1 in the language learning classroom for the purpose of explaining the lecture, like difficult vocabulary, concept, and grammar. The teachers stated that the students used L1 in ESL/EFL classroom for maintaining communication and showing solidarity with each other. They suggested that L1 should be encouraged in L2 classroom but not exceedingly.

Mushtaq and Rabbani (2016) in their study indicated that in the multilingual context of Pakistan, switching from the target language to L1 or local languages is an unavoidable phenomenon. They considered switching of language a useful strategy as they mentioned that code-switching in EFL classroom served the function of explaining complex ideas, words and concepts, clarifying unfamiliar words and maintaining communication among learners and teachers. However, they suggested that code-switching should be limited in the EFL classroom.

Moreover, Chiou (2014) investigated the attitude of 996 Taiwanese college students towards language switching. The participants were grouped into four according to the level of their language proficiency. All the learners favored the use of L1 in L2 classes; even the group with the lowest proficiency level showed strong inclination towards the usage of L1 in L2 learning.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To obtain accurate outcomes and sufficient information from the respondents, simple sequential mix method mode of inquiry was applied. According to Creswell (1999), "A mixed method study is one in which the researchers incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis in single study" (p. 455).

3.2 Research Participants

Participants of the present study were 247 male and female undergraduate EFL learners from various disciplines of different universities and colleges of Quetta, Balochistan.

3.3 Instruments of Data Collection

Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as instrument for data collection. Ethical consent was obtained from the participating educational institutions during the process of data collection. Initially, data was collected through questionnaires, comprising seven point Likert scale items. After collection of quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve participants from the same population.

3.4 Data Analysis Method

For analysis of the data, descriptive and thematic statistics were used. In this method, first quantitative data was entered in SPSS (25.0). Data was analyzed and interpreted in tables. After interpretation of data, interviews were transcribed and main themes were taken out for analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings of Quantitative Data
Descriptive statistics show gender, languages ability and perceptions of students about the speaking of L1/L2 in the EFL classroom.

4.1 Gender of the Participants

In the present study, 247 learners participated in the data collection. Among them, 119 (48.2%) were males, while 128(51.8%) were females. Gender details of the present study are displayed in table1.

Table 1 Gender of the Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	128	51.8%
Male	119	48.2
Total	**247**	**100.0**

4.2 Language Ability as Bi/Multilingual

All the classrooms from where data was collected were bi/multilingual. 223(90.3%) of the respondents had the ability to speak more than two languages, while the participants, who could speak two languages, were 24 (9.7%) in number. The Table 2 reflects the language ability of the participants:

Table 2 Language Ability of Participants as Bi/Multilingual

N	Frequency	Percent
Multilingual	223	90.3
Bilingual	24	9.7
Mean	3.27	
Minimum	2	
Maximum	6	
Total	**247**	**100.0**

4.3 Perceptions of Learners about the Practice of L1/L2 in EFL Classroom

To know perceptions of the learners regarding the practice of L1/L2 in the EFL classes, data was coded and analyzed through descriptive statistics. Codes were divided into four constructs. Table 3 determines 'mean value' and 'standard deviations' of the all the constructs. The mean value and standard deviation of all four constructs are mentioned as follow: The 'mean value' for 'The Use of L1/L2 for Motivation and Concentration in Classroom' is (5.04), which is the highest value among the four values. The value for 'The use of L1/L2 in the EFL Classroom for the purpose of Understanding the Lesson' is (4.99), which is the second highest 'mean value'. Similarly, the 'mean value' for 'Switching betweenL1/L2 for Communicative Purposes' is (4.87),and the 'mean value' of 'Learners' Suggestion about Language Switching' is(4.36) respectively. Mean values of all the four constructs reveal that majority of the participants have positive perception regarding the use of L1/L2 in English language learning classes.

Table 3 Mean Values and Standard Deviations of Scales

Scales/ Constructs	Mean Deviation	Std.
The use of L1/L2 in EFL Classroom for the purpose Of Understanding the lesson.	4.99	.887
Switching Between L1/L2 for Communicative Purposes	4.87	.929
The Use of L1/L2 for Motivation and Concentrate in classroom	5.04	.957
Learners Suggestion about Language Switching	4.36	.991

4.4 *Findings of Qualitative Data*

For analysis of qualitative data, interviews were transcribed and themes were extracted from the interviews. In interviews, the participants, who favored the practice of code-switching in English language learning lessons, mentioned the following purposes of switching between L1/L2 in the EFL classroom:

4.4.1 L1/L2 Use in EFL Classroom for the Purpose of Understanding the Lecture

The participants, who favored the use of L1/L2 in the EFL classroom, expressed that they switched for the purpose of understanding the lecture about the language of learning. They stated that they would be unable to understand English language if their teacher did not allow them to switch to Urdu or local languages during the class.

4.4.2 L1/L2 Use in EFL Classroom for Communicative Purposes

Majority of the respondents expressed that they practiced of L1/L2 in the language learning classes for the purpose of maintaining conversation. They stated that most of the time during conversation with classmates or communication with teachers, they faced breakdown in communication, while using only English. Therefore, for maintaining communication, they switched to Urdu and sometimes regional languages. It also helped them to express themselves freely.

4.4.3 The Use of L1/L2 for Motivation and Concentration in Classroom

The learners also explained that whenever they were allowed to switch between the target language and L1, they were more concentrated and motivated in the class. This was because they understood everything about the target language. Their level of interest also increased in classroom activities.

4.4.4 Suggestions of Respondents about Language Switching in Classroom

When the participants were asked whether code-switching or L1/L2 should be practiced in the EFL classroom or not, majority of the learners responded that switching the target language to L1/ L2 and vice-versa should be encouraged in the language learning classroom. This is because they learned English as a foreign language (EFL), and that they were unable to understand it without the help of code-switching or integration of other languages. They also stated that the switching between languages facilitated them in the language learning classroom, as it increased their knowledge about the target language. They also stated that frequent switching should be discouraged and switching of languages should only be according to the learners' need and classroom environment.

4.5 Discussion

The section of the study answers the two research questions: "*What is the perception of learners about the use of L1/L2 in the EFL classroom?*" and "*What are the effects of language switching in the EFL classroom in a multilingual context?*"

4.5.1 Answer to the First Research Question, "*What is the perception of the learners about the use of L1/L2 in the EFL classroom?*"

The result of both qualitative and quantitative data explored that majority of the learners had positive perception regarding the L1 practice in the EFL classroom. They found code-switching a useful language teaching and learning strategy. The learners switched for the following major purposes: understanding the lecture, maintaining conversation, concentrating in the classroom, and expressing oneself better.

4.5.2 Supports in Comprehending the Lecture

The findings of the data reflected that code-switching helped the learners in understanding the lecture, which included difficult words, complicated concepts, and grammar rules of the target language. The mean value for the scale 'comprehending the lesson' is (4.99).
This shows that most of the learners had optimistic sentiments about the use of L1/L2 in the language learning lessons. The fact was further determined by the interviews of the participants. The participants expressed similar purposes of switching between languages in the EFL classroom. As student 4 expressed in interview:

Std 4. "*There are several reasons/ functions of code-switching but the main reason is that when students are unable to understand the lecture, they switch to Urdu or other local languages. Therefore, the use of L1/L2 in the EFL classroom helps in understanding the lecture better.*"

Almost all the participants responded that English was not their first language nor was it their second language, rather they learned it as a foreign language. The learners experienced difficulties in the lecture whenever English was the only language in the language learning classroom.

4.3.3 Maintains Communication

In classrooms, where English was learned as a foreign language without switching to L1, it was difficult for the leaners to maintain conversation. The results revealed that majority of the learners felt hesitation during conversation either with teachers or classmates, while using only English. Therefore, they preferred switching to their mother tongue or to the native language. The mean value for the scale L1/L2 switching for the purpose of maintaining communication was (4.89). This reflects that majority of the learners preferred the use of L1/L2 in the EFL classroom. Similar views were expressed by the participants in their interviews. For example, participant 6 expressed that:

Std.6. "*English is not our first language. We first think in our mind and we have picture of what we have to speak then we speak out that particular sentence. So, sometimes it is very difficult to convey our message maybe due to a lack of practice. That things are not coming in our mind what we are going to speak in English. Thus, we switch between languages to maintain the conversation.*"
The responses also revealed that in the language learning classroom, during conversation in English only, the learners switched to Urdu or to a language they were fluent in to find proper words either to express themselves or to ask questions.

4.5.4 Gives Opportunity to Learners to Express Themselves

Language is a way through which one can express their feelings, emotions, and affections. If one is not fluent enough in a target language, it would be difficult for them to express themselves freely. Therefore, switching between languages helps the learners to express themselves without any hesitation. As participants 2 and 5 mentioned that:
Std. 2. "*I think I can express myself better, while practicing code-switching. We should use both the languages, so that we can ask questions from teachers in the national or local languages.*"
Std. 5. "*I can express myself better when I am practicing code-switching. Because while communicating in English only, I, sometimes, forget the appropriate word to express myself, which breaks my communication and reduces my confidence.*"

The learners did not find code-switching a threat to their English language development. They viewed it as a useful strategy for language learning.

4.5.5 Motivates and Concentrates the Learners

The participants showed that if there was only English in classroom, they would lose concentration and motivation in the classroom. This is because sometimes they were unable to understand the conversation. They stated that they were more concentrated and motivated in the classroom, when there was language switching. The teacher explained activities and tasks to learners, and the learners actively participated in them. For instance, a participant expressed that:

Std.9. "Switching makes me more concentrated. Switching develops our understanding, and we are attentive in the class."

Sdt.12. "Switching from one language to another language should be done in the EFL classroom. Sometimes, I get bored, when I do not understand what the teacher is saying. Honestly, by code-switching, I become attentive in the classroom."

Similar views were expressed in the study of Fareed et al. (2016) as they stated that the use of L1/L2 made the lecture more interactive and focused, which made the learners motivated and concentrated in the class.

Thus, according to the results, it can be concluded that the learners had positive perceptions regarding practicing L1 in L2 or EFL classroom, as they found it useful for the language learning. Sali (2014) in his study also mentioned that code-switching in the EFL classroom was beneficial as it was used for academic, managerial, and socio-cultural purposes. The learners in this study mentioned several benefits of code-switching in the EFL classroom: it helped the learners in comprehension of English lesson, for instance difficult vocabulary, complex ideas, and grammar rules. Furthermore, language switching helped the learners to avoid discontinuity in communication, and to express themselves better, while switching from L1 to L2. Moreover, they felt more motivated, concentrated, and interested in language learning activity, while practicing code-switching. Hence, they found code-switching as a helpful approach both for teachers and learners of the target language. Similar views were noted in the studies of Mushtaq and Rabbani (2016);Alsheri (2017); Shabir (2017); and Bhatti, Shumsuddin, and Said (2018).

4.6 Answer to the Second Research Question; "*What are the effects of language switching in the EFL classroom in a multilingual context?*"

Qualitative data answers the second research question. Almost all views of the participants were in favor of usingL1 in L2 or EFL classes. Those, who were in favor of code-switching, mentioned the following functions of L1 used in the EFL classroom:

4.6.1. Increases Knowledge of Learners about Target Language

One of the encouraging aspects of the practice of L1 in L2 or EFL classroom is it increases the knowledge about the target language. It makes the learners know the meaning of difficult terminologies, grammar points, and complicated concepts of English language. Therefore, the respondents favored the practice of code-switching in the classroom. For example, student 5 mentioned that:

Std.5. *"It contributes to language learning as English is not our first language nor is our native; it is a foreign language. So code-switching increases our knowledge of the target language, and it does not hamper language learning process."*

Hall and Cook (2013) also reported in their study that L1 in L2 helps to increase knowledge about the English language; it explains unclear meanings of words, grammar, and complex phenomena.

4.6.2 Facilitates the Learners during Conversation

The practice of L1 in L2 or EFL lessons was also found advantageous in the process of language learning as it facilitates the learners during communication. Bhatti, et al. (2018) in their study also consider switching from the target language to L1 as a facilitating tactic for the process of language learning. While speaking in English, when the learners find themselves stuck and face communication breakdown, they find code-switching the best approach to escape the communication breakdown. As participant 6 pointed out that:

Std.6. *"When we are stuck in explaining a difficult concept or unable to communicate directly in English, code-switching becomes increasingly useful; it strengthens the fluency."*

4.6.3 Clarifies the Lesson for Learners

The respondents, who views were in favor of the practice of language switching in the EFL classroom, also expressed that they switched from English to their first language to understand the lecture. They were able to understand what the teacher was going to say when the teacher switched from English to other languages in the classroom. If the teacher did not code-switch, they would not be able to comprehend the lecture.

Std 3. *"Switching from English to L1 is better I think. Because if we keep speaking in English and do not understand a particular concept, we will begin losing interest in the class. Thus, it is better to use code-switching."*

Alsheri (2017) also indicates in his study that the practice of L1 in English language learning serves pedagogical functions, such as clarifying the lesson for leaners, including subject matter, content, and difficult vocabulary.

4.6.5 Cons of the Practice of L1/L2 in English Language Learning Classroom

The above mentioned views of the learners conclude that the first language (L1) played a facilitating role in the EFL classroom in the language learning process. It could be an accommodating language teaching strategy if used judiciously. Only few respondents' opinions were against the practice of L1 in L2 classroom. They stated the following drawbacks of the code-switching in the EFL classroom:

4.6.6 Affects the Process of English Language Learning

The respondents, who did not support code-switching, reported that in the language learning classroom, attention should be given to the language of learning. There should be only English in the EFL classroom. If there is code-switching, it will obstruct the language learning process.

Std 8. *"The main focus should be on English only so that the students become fluent in it. If there is code-switching, they will not be able to be fluent in English. They will be degraded, when speaking in English. Therefore, the teachers must use English in their lectures."*

4.6.7 Weakens Language Learning Competence.

The respondents maintained that if teachers and students constantly code-switched, the students would not be able to learn English language. As the participant 8 stated that:

Std 8. *"If teachers use Urdu in English learning class, the students will not be able to learn English. The students are also practicing code-switching. This is the reason that some students are still unable to speak in English with each other. This weakens our English learning competence."*

Only two respondents opposed the practice of code-switching in the EFL classroom, though they themselves were code-switching in the classroom. They suggested that there should be 'English only' policy in the EFL classroom. If needed due to multilingual context, its use should be to a minimum. Ford (2009) in his study also supported 'English only' policy in the classroom, but only for teachers, the learners were exempted from this restriction. The learners, who were supporting code-shifting, expressed similar views that code-switching should not be prohibited in the language learning classroom, but its practice should be minimized and used only when needed during communication and lecture. Bhooth, et al. (2014) in their study stated that though code-switching was a useful strategy for teaching and learning language, the learners should not be excessively dependent on it. Fareed et al. (2016) also found that switching between L1/L2 in the EFL classroom could be both advantageous and disadvantageous, but they found it more helpful in the EFL multilingual classroom in Pakistan due to its significant role in the language learning.

5. Conclusion

The outcomes of the present study conclude that code-switching in EFL classroom in the multilingual context of Quetta, Balochistan is inevitable. The learners have different linguistic backgrounds and know more than two languages. Therefore, they consciously or, sometimes, unconsciously switch from the target language to their L1 or regional languages and vise-versa. Code-switching was found as a facilitating strategy; it helped the learners in learning of the target language, for instance in translation, comprehension, maintaining communication, building solidarity, and expressing oneself more effectively.

The findings also showed that code-switching was not mainly due to incompetency of the learners in the target language; it was the use of their full linguistics repertoire in the language learning classroom, which in recent studies was termed as translanguaging. It was recommended that code-switching should not be discouraged or banned. It could be limited and used systematically and judiciously.

5.1 Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to the advantages and disadvantages of the use of L1 in L2 or EFL classroom and perceptions of the undergraduate learners towards code-switching in educational institutions of Quetta, Balochistan. The research participants were only EFL learners. The study did not investigate language teachers. The population sample was taken only from three public universities and five colleges of the Quetta City. The study would have had different results if the respondents had been taken from different educational institutions or level of students had been different.

5.2 Recommendations/Suggestions

This study suggests the following recommendations for prospective researchers in the area of language switching in classroom:

The present study focused on only learners' perception about the practice of L1/L2 in English language learning classroom and its advantages and disadvantages. Prospective researchers can undertake further study on teachers' perceptions about language switching in the classroom.

The present study explored the perception of undergraduate EFL learners of Quetta City, but future research can be made on the attitude of public and private school students.
Most specifically, in-depth future research can be done into translanguaging practice in the EFL classroom in a multilingual context.

Lastly, the present study was focused on language switching in language learning classroom in educational institutions. Further research can be conducted to study code-switching outside the classroom in the society

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