THE USE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN EFL CLASSROOMS WITH YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS IN KORÇA, ALBANIA

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Abstract:
The aim of this article is to show to what extent English teachers speak the MT (Albanian) in the EFL classrooms when they teach Young English Learners in a public school in Korça, Albania. To achieve this, the researcher analyzed the data collected from four classroom observations in grades 3 up to 6. Three English teachers were interviewed and compared to show how much they used Albanian and reasons why they used it.

The data obtained from the classroom observations and interviews showed that all the teachers used Albanian in the EFL classrooms in different extents and for different reasons.

Keywords:
Young learners, EFL classrooms, Mother tongue, Albanian

1. Introduction

Using the Mother tongue (MT) in the EFL classrooms has still remained in the center of the debate among teachers, educators and researchers due to their diverse opinions.

For some researchers like Carless (2001) the use of the first language is common and a natural act in foreign language teaching and it seems to make a positive contribution to the learning process. Similarly, Macaro (1997) sees the exclusion of the mother tongue as impractical and deprives learners of an important tool for language learning. According to Nunan and Lamb (1996), foreign language teachers find the prohibition of the mother tongue in foreign language classes to be impossible.

Lu (1985) reports that the use of the mother tongue is strongly recommended due to the absence of opportunities for the actual use of the foreign language outside the classroom. Auerbach (1993, cited in Sharma,

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2006:81) not only acknowledges the positive role of the mother tongue in the classroom but also suggests its uses for classroom management, discussing cross-cultural issues, giving instructions, explaining errors, and checking for comprehension.

While advocating the use of the MT in FL teaching, it is important to note that there are no criteria with regard to the right dosage of the use of the MT.

Cook (2001) presents the criteria for the use of the MT: efficiency, learning, naturalness, and external relevance. *Efficiency* relates to doing something more effectively through the MT. *Learning* concerns whether FL learning is enhanced by the use of the students' MT. *Naturalness* relates to whether students prefer the use of their MT rather than the FL regarding certain topics. Finally, *external relevance* is whether the MT helps students with uses of the FL they may need beyond the classroom. The last criterion may be associated with the use of English for communication purposes; it may refer to everyday topics, life skills, and pragmatic language such as conversing or participating in online chats in English.

Although these criteria may be useful to clarify the general teaching circumstances for using the MT with regard to a certain class or topic, they certainly cannot substitute the formal guidelines that should be defined practically and in terms of specific topics, situations, and frequency.

What about the use of Albanian language in EFL classrooms in the public elementary school in Korça, Albania? Here English is started in the 3rd grade and the teachers teach 2 lessons in a week. The aim of this article is to present the use of Albanian in the four classes in an elementary school to see its frequency and the reasons why it is spoken.

2. Methodology

2.1. The research questions

The research questions which this study aims at are:

1) If Albanian is used in the EFL classrooms, how frequently is it used?
2) What are the reasons for its use?

2.2. Context and participants

The study is focused on four classes in a public elementary school in Korça district in Albania. The participants of the study are three English teachers teaching in 4 grades. They are indentified as Teacher A who taught in the 3rd grade, Teacher B who taught in the 4th grade and teacher C in the

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5th and 6th grade. They were observed to see how often they used the Mother tongue (Albanian) and why they used it. Also they were compared to show how much they used Albanian.

3. Instruments of the study

3.1 Observations and interviews

The instrument used in the study is observation as it serves as an opportunity to give real results from the context. 4 observations were made in 4 grades: from the third grade to the sixth grade. Interviews were also used with the teachers to get more information concerning the use of Albanian in their classrooms and to see what they think it. The use of Albanian was measured in minutes using a stopwatch. Then the minutes were converted into percentage and 1 minute is equal to 2. 2 %.

4. The results of the observations

4.1 The 3rd grade had 23 students and they had been studying English for seven months. The aim of the lesson was to create dialogues between the students: *Can you…?* Yes, *I can. No, I can't*. The teacher had 9 years of experience and she used modern methods to involve students to communicate in English. The pie chart shows how much she spoke Albanian during 45 minutes.

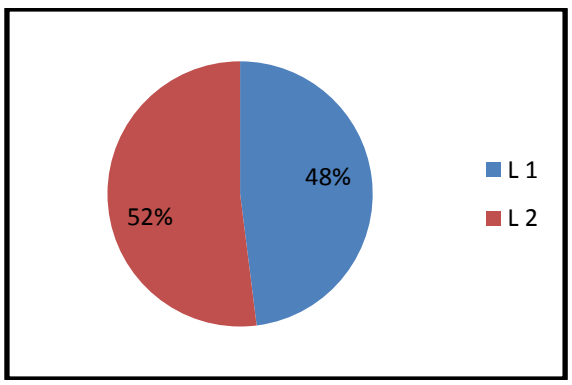


Chart 1. The proportion of L1 and L2 in the 3rd grade

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The teacher used Albanian 48% of the lesson and English 52% of the lesson in 45 minutes. The reasons why the teacher used the mother tongue are shown in the table below:

The reasons of Albanian use	**Percentage**	**Minutes**
Draw students' attention	2. 2 %	1 minute
Give instructions	6. 6 %	3 minutes
Translation of new words	13. 2 %	6 minutes
Explain the interaction between students duringdialogues	8. 8 %	4 minutes
Error corrections	6. 6 %	3 minutes
Students' evaluation	2. 2 %	1 minute
Ending the lesson	4. 4%	2 minutes
Giving and clarifying the homework	4. 4%	2 minutes
Total	**48. 4 %**	**22 minutes**

Table 1. The reasons for Albanian use in the 3rd grade

The teacher spent 13. 2% (around 6 minutes) to translate the new words. She wrote them on the board and used drills to practise them. The new words that the teacher translated were these:

Ride a scooter/ skate/ ride a bike/ ride a skateboard/marbles/ jacks/teddy bear/use/ I know.

The teacher used Albanian (8. 8 %) to explain the interaction between students during several dialogues until students were confident to interact without the help of the teacher:

T: *Now, it's your turn, ask your friend.*
Ask your friend what he can do.

She also gave some instructions in Albanian (6. 6 %):

T: *Write the names of the toys.*
Complete the sentences.
Ask classmates what they can do.
Draw what you can do and write about it.
Did you complete the exercise?
Listen and read the story.

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The teacher corrected the students in Albanian (6. 6%) by using the expressions:

T: *No. You made a mistake.*

Read it again.

Repeat it after me.

How did you complete the sentence?

She used the tone of the voice in English to draw students' attention when they made a mistake.

The teacher ended the lesson and clarified the homework in Albanian (4. 4 %). The students signed the homework and greeted the teacher in English.

She also drew the attention of two students who were looking at some other pages of the book in one minute or 2. 2 % of the lesson.

The total amount of Albanian in the EFL classroom was 48. 4 or 22 minutes of the 45 minutes of the English lesson. The students practised English in reading and listening a passage "*Funny friends*", they completed successfully the exercises about *can/can't*. They also practised dialogues with *can* and *can't*.

4. 2 The 4th grade had 30 students. It was the second year of studying English and the teacher had 7 years of experience in teaching English. The aim of the lesson was to make students express their preference about the food they *like* or *don't like*. The use of MT is shown in the pie chart below:

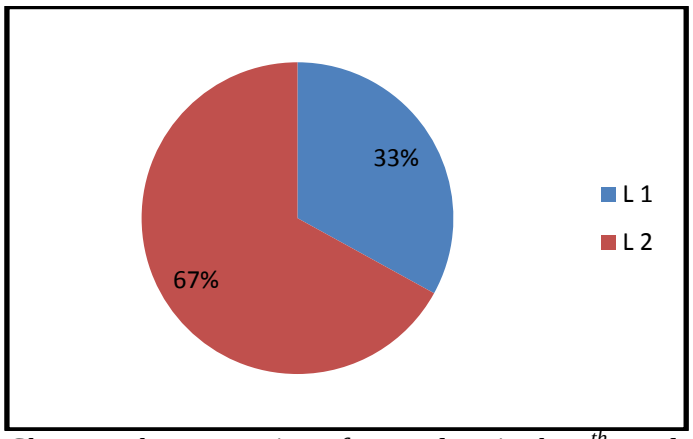


Chart 2. The proportion of L1 and L2 in the 4th grade

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The teacher spoke 33% of the lesson in Albanian and the reasons why the teacher used it were these:

The reasons of Albanian use	**Percentage**	**Minutes**
Giveinstructions	6. 6 %	3 minutes
Translation of new words	8. 8 %	4 minutes
Explain the interaction between students during a dialogue	4. 4%	2 minutes
Error corrections	4. 4%	2 minutes
Students' evaluation	2. 2 %	1 minute
Praising the students	2. 2 %	1 minute
Clarifying homework	4. 4%	2 minutes
Total	**33 %**	**15 minutes**

Table 2. The reasons for Albanian use in the 4th grade

The English teacher asked about the homework in English. Then she introduced the new lesson using the Food Flashcards. She practised them using drills but she also translated and wrote the new words on the board (8. 8%):

Burger/ hot dog/ spaghetti/ chips/ soup/ salad/ milk/ lemonade/ orange juice

The teacher gave instructions in Albanian (6. 6%):

T: *Write the new words in the notebook.*
Read and match the new words.
Tell a classmate about a meal.
Mark the table with a tick or X.
Complete the last column with a classmate's information.
Listen carefully.

When the students had to make a dialogue about the food they liked and didn't like, the teacher explained in Albanian what they had to do:

T: *And now ask your friend what food he likes or doesn't like.*
The other friend will reply: I like…. Or I don't like…

Also the teacher corrected the students in Albanian (4. 4%) during the 45 minutes of the English lesson:

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T: *There is something wrong in what you just said. Be careful. You should say something else.*

So the teacher drew the students' attention towards the mistake and they self-corrected.

At the end of the lesson the teacher clarified the homework in Albanian by saying what they had to do in the Workbook. She took 2 minutes to do that or 4. 4 % of the lesson.

She sometimes used Albanian to praise students' work. But this happened occasionally or 2. 2 % of the lesson:

T: *Good! Well done.*

4. 3 The 5th grade had 29 students and they had been studying English for two years. The teacher had 14 years of experience. The topic of the lesson was about ***some*** and ***any***. The English teacher had explained them in the previous lesson and she had to revise them. The use of the MT is shown in the pie chart below:

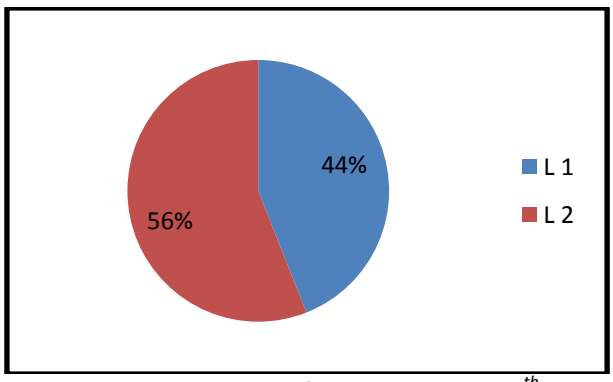


Chart 3. The proportion of L1 and L2 in the 4th grade

The English teacher used Albanian 44 % of the lesson and the reasons why she used it are presented in the table below:

The reasons of Albanian use	**Percentage**	**Minutes**
Draw students' attention	2. 2 %	1 minute
Revision of the Grammar instructions about *some* and *any*	13. 2 %	6 minutes

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Error corrections	4. 4%	2 minutes
Translation of the new words	4. 4%	2 minutes
Translation of the sentences in the new text	11 %	5 minutes
Clarifying the homework	2. 2 %	1 minute
Total	**34. 4 %**	**17 minutes**

Table 3. The reasons of Albanian use in the 5th grade

In the 5th grade the English teacher spent most of the time revising the grammar instructions about *some* and *any* (13. 2%) in Albanian. She wrote them on the board. The example sentences were given by the teacher and by the students. The teacher corrected the students in Albanian (4. 4%) when they didn't use some and any in the correct sentence. She asked the other students when their friend made a mistake:

S1: *Is there some bread?*
T: *Is your friend correct?*
S2: *Is there any bread?*

And she elicited the correct answer in English. She repeated this procedure with several students.

The teacher translated the new words in Albanian (4. 4 %):

Crisps – patatina
Stick – shkop
Noodles – makarona
Relatives – te aferm
Unlucky – pa fat
Envelope – zarf
Paper – leter
Pilgrim – pelegrin
Settle – vendosem
Harvest – te korrat
Feast - feste

The teacher asked the students to read the new text about "*Thanksgiving*" and helped students translate the sentences from the text (11%). She drew the attention of some students (2. 2%) who were not attentive in the lesson:

T: *Kristi and Tomas, what are you doing? Look at page 83, exercise 1.*

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At the end of the lesson the teacher gave the homework and clarified what they had to do in Albanian. This lasted about 1 minute.

4. 4 The 4th observation was done in the 6th grade which had 30 students. The English teacher was the same as the 5th grade. The topic of the lesson was: Vocabulary: *Shops* and *Writing*: *"An email describing your neighbourhood"*. The level of the students was low comparing to the book they were dealing with.

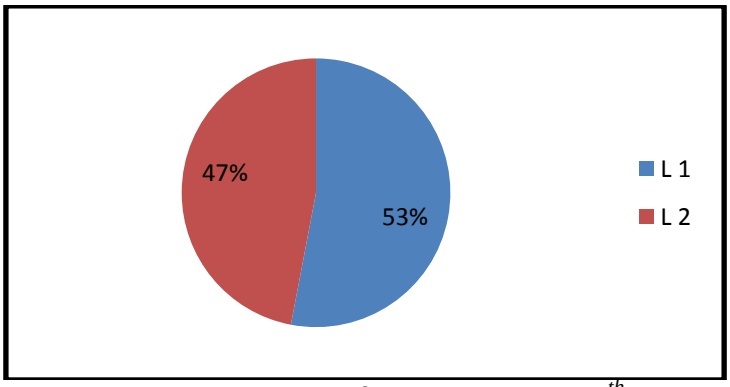


Chart 4. The proportion of L1 and L2 in the 6th grade

The teacher used Albanian 53% of the lesson and the reasons why she used it were these:

The reasons of Albanian use	**Percentage**	**Minutes**
Checking homework	4. 4%	2 minutes
Teacher instructions	6. 6 %	3 minutes
Writing instructions	8. 8 %	4 minutes
Error corrections	4. 4%	2 minutes
Translation of the new words	8. 8 %	4 minutes
Discipline problems	2. 2 %	1 minute
Clarifying the homework	4. 4%	2 minutes
Total	**39. 6 %**	**18 minutes**

Table 4. The reasons for Albanian use in the 3rd grade

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The teacher started the lesson by checking the homework in Albanian. There were some students who hadn't done their homework and some, who hadn't done them correctly, and it lasted 2 minutes or 4. 4% of the English lesson.

She spent 4 minutes (8. 8%) translating the new words about the shops:

greengrocer's/ chemists/ post office / newsagent/ baker's/ shoe shop/ pet shop/ florist's/ electronics shop/ stamp/ drop a line/ nearby.

She elicited the answers of the question: *What can we do in these shops?* in English to check if students had understood the function of the shops.

The English teacher spoke in Albanian to clarify the Writing instructions about emails. They had to describe their neighbourhood. She wrote the instructions in English on the board and read the examples. This lasted about 4 minutes or 8. 8% of the English lesson.

Some of teachers' instructions were in Albanian concerning the way they had to complete some exercises (6. 6%):

T: *Find Jane's house on the map. Give directions from her house to the: supermarket, Marco's restaurant, Bill's café, Tony's café.*

Where does each dialogue take place? Listen and say.

Stand up and act the dialogues.

Be quiet.

Be attentive.

The teacher corrected the students mainly about the movement prepositions as they were performing the dialogues to give directions on the map. She listened to the dialogue first and then corrected the students and made them repeat again the dialogue. The correction took about 2 minutes (4. 4%) during the exercise for 5 students.

There were some discipline problems with some inattentive students and the teacher drew their attention in Albanian. These lasted about 1 minute (2. 2%) of the English lesson.

At the end of the lesson the English teacher used Albanian to clarify the homework and what they had to prepare for the next lesson for about 2 minutes (4. 4%).

5. The results of the interviews

The English teachers were interviewed to get more specific answers why they used Albanian in the classrooms. *Teacher A,* who taught in the 3 rd grade, said that students at the beginning of their English lesson demonstrate limited understanding of their English so they don't understand what she is saying. In general she uses a good mix of the FL and MT to keep the lesson going. The use of the MT helps also the weaker students not

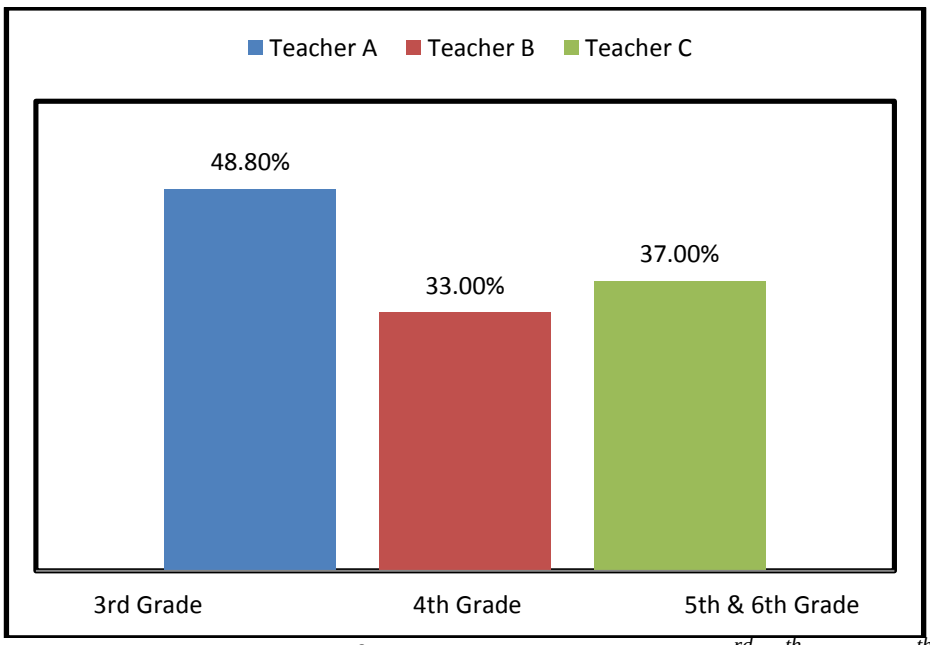
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to feel frustrated and confused. It is easy for them to learn English vocabulary if they get additional explanation in their MT. Explanations in the MT can save time as students understand faster if the teacher clarifies issues in the shortest and most efficient way.

Teacher B who taught in the 4th grade said that MT is especially effective with young learners at beginner levels to check instructions, to ensure that some notions have been correctly understood and for general classroom management. It is helpful in establishing the general rules or reviewing behavioural problems of the class.

Teacher C taught in the 5th and 6th grade and said that using Albanian in the EFL classrooms is important in some cases, for example when the teacher sees that her students don't understand how to do an exercise. MT is necessary for beginners because it has a facilitating role and it is the only way in which the teacher can ensure the correct comprehension of the students.

If the three English teachers are compared, we will have this graph:



Graph 1. The comparison of the English teachers in the 3rd, 4th grade, 5th and 6th grade

The chart above indicates that the use of Albanian in the EFL classroom is declining from Teacher A to Teacher B and Teacher C, from

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48. 8% to 33% in the 4th grade and 37% in the 5th and 6th grade. As it is seen the teachers tend to speak less Albanian in the EFL classrooms. This is a positive fact for the EFL classrooms where English should dominate.

6. Conclusions

The present study shows that all the observed teachers in the EFL classrooms use the Mother tongue, Albanian, in foreign language classrooms because it can help the teaching and learning process. Teacher A uses the MT 48. 8% of the lesson, teacher B uses it 33% of the lesson and Teacher C uses the MT 37% of the lesson. Furthermore, teachers and students do not use their mother tongue randomly. Rather, it seems to be used systematically and purposefully. This is supported by the writer's findings. For example, the use of the mother tongue is shown clearly in explaining difficult words and complex grammar rules.

The study also shows that teachers are concerned about the influence of the mother tongue on the process of foreign language teaching and learning. The overuse of the mother tongue makes students unable to communicate in English, and it distracts and demotivates them of using it. Therefore, the use of the mother tongue should be less encouraged in a foreign language classroom.

But total prohibition of the mother tongue will certainly deprive students of certain opportunities to learn more and better, especially those who have just started learning English. So the teacher should know when to use and when not to use the mother tongue.

The findings of this study point to the need for controlling the use of the mother tongue in the EFL classroom and the writer hopes that this study will open wider doors to exploring new ways of MT use in the EFL classrooms.

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