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The Effect of Teaching English Grammar Bilingually to True Beginners at a University in Ecuador

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## ABSTRACT

This study looked into how teaching grammar bilingually affected the performance of students English as a Foreign Language (EFL) on grammar examination at an Ecuadorian institution of higher education. Research to date has predominantly focused on the attitudes and preferences of instructors and students about the use of the first language, how it is distributed during class, how it helps learners work together to complete tasks, and how teacher and student interactions take place in the classroom. Research on the impact of L1 use on L2 learning has mostly examined vocabulary learning. In the current study, 71 students, aged 17 to 36, enrolled in a preparation course prior to university classes were randomly assigned to a condition in which the L2 grammar was taught bilingually or a condition in which the L2 grammar was explained using only the L2, and their performance on grammar was tested and compared. The results of this study suggest that grammar learning was enhanced by both the bilingual condition and the L2-only condition. The results demonstrate that there were not significant differences on both immediate and delayed posttests between the bilingual instruction condition and the L2-only condition. There are some suggested explanations for these findings.

## Keywords: effect; teaching; language; students.

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## RESUMEN

Este estudio analizó cómo la enseñanza bilingüe de la gramática inglesa afectó el desempeño de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en las pruebas de gramática en una institución de educación superior ecuatoriana. La investigación hasta la fecha se ha concentrado en las actitudes y preferencias de los instructores y estudiantes sobre el uso de la lengua natal, cómo se distribuye durante la clase, cómo ayuda a los estudiantes a trabajar juntos para completar las tareas, cómo se dan las interacciones entre maestros y estudiantes en el salón de clases, y el impacto en el aprendizaje de vocabulario L2. En este estudio, 71 estudiantes, de 17 a 36 años de edad, matriculados en un curso preuniversitario, fueron asignados aleatoriamente a una condición en la que la gramática L2 se enseñaba de forma bilingüe o una condición en la que la gramática L2 se explicaba utilizando solo la L2, y se evaluó y comparó el desempeño en gramática. Los resultados sugieren que el aprendizaje de la gramática mejoró en ambas condiciones y no hubo diferencias significativas entre las pruebas posteriores inmediatas y tardías entre los grupos. Se presentan en este documento algunas posibles explicaciones sobre estos hallazgos.

***Palabras clave:*** efecto; enseñanza; idioma; estudiantes.

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Por favor consigne los siguientes puntos para agilizar el proceso de atención y contacto sobre la gestión de su manuscrito a publicar.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although there are currently theoretical advancements, research findings, and prominent writers of English Language Teaching (ELT) methodology that attribute the learner's first language (L1) a role in learning a second language (L2) such as Newton and Nation (2021), Nation and Macallister (2021), and Scrivener (2017), there is still the perception among some English language teachers that excluding the learners' L1 from the classroom is associated with good standards in the discipline.

Current laws governing higher education in Ecuador mandate that undergraduates reach a level of proficiency in English language equivalent to the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Thus, decision makers at universities, based on wrong assumptions about L1 use in the L2 classroom, could implement policies and guidelines that suppress the learners' L1 during L2 instruction. This could prevent students from using an important mediating tool, and would make more difficult for them to reach the B1 level of proficiency. Therefore, it is very important to teach learners with current teaching practices based on research, and not on opinions.

In this vein, this study attempts to provide stakeholders important insights about the role of the learners’ L1 in L2 acquisition and demystify its use in the classroom. This research-based information will also support administrators and teachers in their decisions and daily teaching. In addition, since the learners’ L1 is valued and recognized, lessons will be authentically student-centered.

Some scholars have made a literature review on the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. For instance, Almoayidi (2018) concluded that even though there are numerous studies that claim that using the L1 does contribute to L2 learning, other studies suggest that the best way to learn an L2 is by using the L2 as the language of the instruction, and that the decision to use one or the other will depend on several factors such as the type of learners, the instructor’s L2 level of proficiency, the learner’s purposes of learning the L2, and government or school regulations. Zulfilkar (2019) states that using the L1 in the L2 classroom is inevitable and it does not impede L2 learning and has a facilitating and key role in learning and teaching language. Shin et al. (2020) made a review of published empirical literature on the use of the L1 in the FL classroom from 2011 to 2018. They found that the majority of studies support judicious L1 use in L2 instruction. By that it’s meant not only the amount and frequency of L1, but also its purpose, content, and type of tasks to maximize L2 learning.

Other researchers have conducted interviews and collected data from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews administered to learners to get insights regarding their views on L1 use in the L2 classroom. These studies have in common that they found that learners have a favorable use of the L1 for learning the L2. For instance, Shariati (2029), found that lower-level proficiency learners have a better attitude towards L1 use than upper-level learners. Participants reported they used the L1 to ask new language topics, to find correct English words, and to explain grammar points to their classmates. They also believed that teachers should use the L1 to explain difficult vocabulary, grammar, and for class management. Galali and Cinkara (2017) found similar responses from their student participants, but with the difference that advanced learners preferred the L2 because it is more conducive to L2 learning. Only in Saburlu’s study (2019) learners reported negative views on L1 use, arguing that they can learn faster and easily when they are exposed to the L2 more often.

Similarly, other researchers have aimed to study the teachers’ perspectives on L1 use in teaching the L2 through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, too.

Rasheed et al. (2017),

interviewed and recorded the classes of 10 secondary female English school teachers in Pakistan in a multilingual context. The data showed that code-switching by teachers during instruction was common and that learners did not speak in English because they did not want to make mistakes.

interviewed 8 EFL learners and gave questionnaires to 258 EFL learners at a university in Kurdistan to investigate their attitudes towards L1 use during English lessons. The results showed that participants' attitudes regarding using their L1 to help them learn English language were rather favorable. They concluded that learners' L1 plays a facilitating role in learning a foreign language.

Las principales preguntas propuestas son:

¿Cuál es el tema que se aborda en este artículo?

¿Cuál es el problema de investigación? (Problema o vacío en el conocimiento que se buscará resolver con la investigación)

¿Por qué es importante abordar este tema, cuál es su relevancia? (Justificación)

¿Qué teoría o teorías sustentan el trabajo, es decir, qué marco teórico se utiliza? ¿Cuáles son los principales postulados, premisas, axiomas o términos más importantes del tema, que variables o categorías de análisis ocupa? ¿Según qué autores?)

¿Qué estudios previos hay al respecto? ¿Qué se puede citar de ellos? ¿Qué aporta este trabajo a esos antecedentes?

¿En qué contexto se realiza esta investigación? Antecedentes históricos, sociales, culturales, legales, demográficos, según sea el caso se hará uso de uno o varios tópicos, y requerirá mayor o menor detalle del contexto, incluso esto se puntualiza en mayor detalle para estudios cualitativos, y más si son con un enfoque etnográfico.

Finalmente, para cerrar el apartado de la introducción se mencionarán las hipótesis (si las hubiera), y el o los objetivos que marcarán el propósito del estudio.

## METHODS

This paper aligns to a positive research paradigm and adopted a quantitative research method. The research design was quasi-experimental and involved a pretest/posttest control group design, and a delayed test for each group. The data obtained from grammar tests were scored and statistical analysis was conducted.

The participants were 71 students enrolled in a preparation course prior to be admitted to a university located in Quevedo city, in Ecuador. After obtaining authorization from the corresponding officials from the university, students from 33 classrooms were invited to be part of the research. They were provided with detailed information about the study through an Informed Consent Form (IFC). A different version that required parents or custodians’ approval was given to minors. A total of 142 students signed the IFC and took a placement test on a different day. This instrument was part of the course book used at the university. The publisher authorized the use of its materials for this research. Because the study focused on true beginners or pre-A1 learners, only participants who were placed at level 1A or 1B were selected, which was a total of 71 people. According to the table provided by the course book, students who are placed at those levels are on the way to attain an A1 level. The final participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 23, but one of them was 36. Then they were randomly placed in an experimental group or in a control group with a matching process based on gender. After that, there were a total of 35 participants in the control group, and 36 participants in the experimental group.

The instructional material was the same coursebook used at the university for level 1 students. The grammar topics included the following: 1) The simple present of the verb be and possessive adjectives; 2) singular subject pronouns and yes-no questions with be; 3) plural subject pronouns and wh-questions with be; 4) *Who* and *How old* with be; 5) demonstratives, articles *a* and *an*, and plurals; 6) possessive pronouns, whose, and possessive nouns; 7) simple present statements; 8) simple present yes-no questions.

The research took place in six weeks in January and February in 2017. In the first four weeks, participants attended two 2-hour class sessions a week. The experimental group attended lessons on Mondays and Wednesdays from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The control group attended on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Two weeks after the fourth week, a delayed test was administered to measure the mid-term effects of both types of instruction.

Before and after each class, a pretest and a posttest were given to the control group and experimental group. The testing instrument was part of the material of the course book. All lessons were taught in English, except for the experimental group. They received English grammar instruction by using translation through the sequence L2-L1-L2, for each word, phrase, or sentence. The rest of the lesson was completely in English. Both groups were taught by using the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach. Before each lesson started, participants were given a grammar test about the topics to be explained on that day. Participants were given 8 minutes to complete them. After that, each lesson for both groups began by introducing new vocabulary explicitly through contextualization, cognates, drawings, pictures, and verbal and written explanations delivered only in English. Then an audio recording containing a conversation was played. The conversation included the vocabulary introduced previously and the new grammar was presented implicitly and contextualized. After that, grammar was explained through the use of a table that highlighted in bold letters the new structures to help learners to notice them. Grammar was explained in English, but the control group received an explanation bilingually by using the sequence L2-L1-L2 whether for words, phrases, or sentences. After concept check questions, participants completed the grammar exercises individually, and help was provided during that activity. Later, we checked the answers in class. Then participants were given a semi-controlled speaking activity. Assistance and feedback were offered at the request of participants or if a mistake was so important that could impede communication in the future. Again, all was done using English.

Once the speaking activity was over, the grammar posttest was administered using the same instrument from the course book. Lessons were only for four weeks. Two weeks later, participants took a delayed test in order to measure the mid-term effect of both types of grammar instruction.

The knowledge of grammar from the participants was tested using objective assessment. Since the testing instruments were from the book series published by a worldwide publisher from one of the top five universities in the world, it was assumed that the instruments had been tested for validity and reliability.

Given the research design, the nominal type of scale, and the sample size was around 30, the *t* statistic was selected for the inferential analysis.

inferential statistic analysis was carried out to find out if there was significant difference between : 1) between . IBM SPSS version 23 was used to run t test not assuming homogenous variances with p < 0.01

## RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN

En este apartado se exponen los hallazgos, lo trascendente del estudio expresado con cierto detalle en la exposición que sostenga el porqué del trabajo: justificando las conclusiones a las que se arribó. Los resultados deben ser objetivos y claros demostrando que son la consecuencia lógica de la metodología utilizada.

No se debe ser reiterativo, es decir, no debe de exponer un mismo dato o conjunto de datos en màs de un formato, ya sea texto, cuadros o gráficas. Es suficiente sólo una forma de presentación. Así también los datos deben presentarse estableciéndose un orden lógico y sistemático, que a su vez permitan la discusión con la teoría que sustenta el trabajo, así como con antecedentes de otras investigaciones resaltando similitudes y contraposiciones.

También durante la discusión se podrá exponer las interpretaciones del autor, como explicaciones de principios, regularidades y las consecuentes generalizaciones del trabajo, en los casos que amerite.

Finalmente, debe subrayarse la novedad científica, lo controversial, las perspectivas y prospectivas teóricas, las aplicaciones prácticas y la pertinencia del trabajo en relación a la línea de investigación.

## ILUSTRACIONES, TABLAS, FIGURAS.

Necesariamente numeradas en forma correlativa que permitan su referencia inmediata en el texto. Con cabeceras apropiadas con sus títulos correspondientes. Leyendas explicativas que aclaren símbolos, abreviaturas, etc. así, también guías de datos, imágenes, estadísticas, etc. Al tratarse de las tablas, éstas determinarán claramente en cada columna un encabezamiento, precisando el tipo de datos que se registran en ella y las unidades de medida que se hubieren utilizado.

## CONCLUSIONES

No se repite lo anteriormente dicho. El autor expresa su criterio, su postura específica frente al tema y lo sustenta de conformidad con los datos obtenidos y una argumentación teórica con plena consistencia en aquellos. No debe salirse de este rango, no debe caer en la subjetividad, evite argumentaciones sin evidencia fáctica-reflexiva de los mismos.

Y finalmente, en caso de que existan indicios o interrogantes no resueltos, plantéelos en este apartado compartiendo la tarea pendiente con otros investigadores que pueden acompañar y ampliar el estudio.

## LISTA DE REFERENCIAS

En este apartado se expondrán todas las fuentes consultadas y citadas en el artículo. Ya sean que fueran presentadas como citas directas o indirectas, se enlistaran por orden alfabético según las recomendaciones de las Normas de Estilo APA (Sexta o Séptima Edición). Se recomienda no citar páginas de internet cuyos contenidos no estén debidamente comprobados y que no mantengan estándares de calidad requeridos para un artículo científico (ejemplos: rincón del vago, monografías de dudosa procedencia, entre otras).

Para facilitar las Referencias de la American Psychological Association puede utilizar el gestor de Referencias de Word, u otro programa de su agradado como Zotero, Mendeley u otro.

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