

AN INVESTIGATION ON TRANS-LANGUAGING IN TERTIARY-LEVEL ESL CLASSROOMS

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This research is focused on trans-languaging, an emerging body of studies related to using the first language (L1) as a resource in teaching and learning a second language. The continuous debate regarding the use of L1 in ESL classrooms has drawn much attention over recent years. ‘Trans-languaging,’ a popular concept among linguists that adapts to the needs of diverse and interconnected communities, has offered new perspectives on looking into this matter. The present research focuses on using L1 in tertiary-level ESL classrooms to support students’ language development and learning. Three first-year classrooms of three proficiency levels (Preliminary, Intermediate, Advanced) from the Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Ruhuna, were observed for two months and observations were made on the following: the purpose of using L1 in ESL classrooms and the teachers’ perceptions towards using L1 to facilitate target language acquisition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers to understand their perceptions. According to observations, the L1 was used in all three classrooms. However, the use of L1 in the preliminary class was considerably higher than in the other two classrooms. The purpose of using L1 in the three classrooms was to help students become proficient in English while providing support as needed, even though they varied in frequency. The findings of the semi-structured interviews revealed that teachers hold both positive and negative perceptions regarding the use of L1 in ESL classrooms. However, it was apparent that even the teachers who dislike using L1 have agreed that using L1 is beneficial in building rapport with the students, mainly when working with students of a low proficiency level. According to the research findings, using L1 in the ESL classroom can assist learners of a lower proficiency level to understand difficult concepts and acquire the language as it lowers the affective filter. Therefore, further research can be conducted to gather more insight into using L1 to clarify complex concepts, instructions, or vocabulary when students struggle to understand English in the ESL classroom. Rather than eliminating the linguistic tools that the learners bring to the classroom as their L1, the most common trends of trans-languaging focus on utilising the repertoire of linguistic tools of L1 to assist the L2 acquisition.

Keywords: ESL classroom, First language, Perceptions, Proficiency levels, Trans-languaging