

A critique on 'Teachers' self-reported L1 and L2 use and self-assessed L2 proficiency in primary EFL education' (Wilden & Porsch , 2020)

Theoretical Backgrounds

In foreign language teaching, the theory "as much L2 as possible, as little L1 as necessary" has been recognized as a general agreement. There are many arguments on whether L1 use in class could actually support L2 learning efficiency. The previous studies suggest that the overuse of L1 would reduce students' opportunities in learning L2 in class (Turnbull, 2011); a frequent L1 use and learners' L2 proficiency has a negative correlations (Helmke et al., 2008).

In Germany, students in all federal states start learning English in year 3 and in four states as early as year 1 (Rixon, 2013). Unfortunately, Germany has a shortage in EFL education specialist and there is a big chance that primary teacher will teach every primary subject in the same class. Under this context, the author assumed that most primary students in Germany were not learning English from a teacher who possess a professional qualification in EFL education. However, teachers' L2 qualifications are closely related to their L2 proficiency which students' learning effectiveness largely depends on (Unsworth, Persson, Prins, & de Bot, 2015). Teachers with lower L2 proficiency and less L2 use in class tend to have lower or no qualifications in L2 (Dörr, 2018). In order to better serve Germany's primary EFL education and offer more constructive suggestions. This article aims to test whether those previous theories on L1 and L2 could be applied in primary EFL education in Germany to test that teachers' L2 qualifications are related to teachers' L2 proficiency and L2 use frequency in class. Thus, this article proposes that a more frequent use of L2 is associated with both teachers' professional qualifications and their L2 proficiency, and they share a positive correlation. In addition, this article also discusses the relations between teachers' EFL qualifications and L1 usages and L2 usages in class, respectively, by using teachers'

self-reported data from questionnaires. Even though this article used self-assessed and self-reported data to test these hypotheses, the theories are closely related to the hypotheses, the contextual background (current primary EFL education situations in Germany) has provided a necessity for the research. Helmkeet, Turnbull and Dörr's theories are all associated with L2 use in class and L2 proficiency. Therefore, this article is based on L1 and L2 usages in class and later discusses L2 proficiency and its relations with L2 qualification, with a clear logic and strong arguments.

Methodology

In order to test the hypotheses, the author conducted an online survey among 844 teachers in year 4 in Germany primary schools. Two types of questionnaires were distributed to collect data of teachers' L1 and L2 usages in class. By putting these data in SPSS (version 25.0) and MAXQDA, the author further discussed the hypotheses. The research questions are simple: in which situations teachers in primary EFL class use L1 and L2; does EFL teachers' self-assessed L2 proficiency has statistically significant relationship with their L2 use in class and their professional qualification.

All the participants for this survey were teachers teaching EFL in year 4 in two federal states. 844 participants (809 female and 35 male) between 25 and 67 years old were involved. 339 of them had EFL education as major; while 404 teachers majored in other subjects but had primary EFL-related courses later; the rest 101 teachers had neither a diploma nor professional training in EFL education.

This study is mostly a quantitative analysis based on questionnaire (L1 usages in EFL class was analyzed qualitatively). A combination of SPSS and these valid data can be persuasive. However, by observing the questionnaire, there are certain flaws that may deflect the data results.

First, to discover 'How often do you use L2 in class', the author listed dozens of

situations in 'L2-related situation' and 'class-management situations', the participants could only respond these in frequency scale (never, rarely, often or always). Participants would answer this based more on their 'experienced' estimations rather than what the real situations were. Teachers who believed themselves in using L2 for 'class management situations' more often had the possibility of overlooking their frequencies in using L2 for 'L2-related situations'. Besides, the frequency in each scale didn't equal the real number of times, it was unjust for teachers who used L2 only in either situations. The option 'always' for teacher A has the possibility of equaling option 'often' for teacher B. This questionnaire did not list the exact number of times for each frequency. For example, 'Never' means 0 times; 'Rarely' means 0-10 times; 'Often' means 10-20 times and 'Always' means 20 times and more. Only by putting the frequencies this way can the questionnaire fully reflect the real situation. Besides, a four-point Likert scale would compel participants to make a choice without other options and is considered to be less accurate than a five-point or seven-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932). For this questionnaire, it is either making a clear standard of the frequency or letting teachers use one or two classes to count each 'L2 usage situations' and 'class management situations', and later calculate the exact times. This also happened in questionnaire *To what extent do these statements apply to your ability to speak L2?* With only a four-point scale and six self-assessment situations, this questionnaire also lacked in comprehensiveness.

Second, these questionnaires were distributed to two federal states by school, North Rhine-Westphalia and Lower Saxony. The fact that these two states are relatively more advanced than the rest states in Germany indicates that teachers in EFL education from other states may present another completely different data. Not to mention that in North Rhine-Westphalia, children begin learning EFL in year 1, focusing more on speaking; while children in Lower Saxony begin this progress in year 3, focusing on writing. The two-year gap and the different curriculum foci may result different levels of using L2 in class. The samples for the study were different, whether the data from these various samples could support the research and its final conclusion was

questionable. It may seem equitable to use a conjoined data from these two states which share nearly no similarities. However, if the data from each state can also support the hypothesis as the conjoined data did, it would be more persuasive. In addition, participants were involved in this survey voluntarily, so there was a possibility that those teachers with a lower L2 proficiency or without a EFL education qualification had not participated in this survey at all for their own reasons (eg. feeling insecure, occupation safety .etc.).

Third, the data used to test the relationship between L2 proficiency and L2 usages in class were all self-assessed data. These data may be biased because participants might overrate their L2 proficiency and exaggerate their L2 usages in class for their own career reasons, and these data had not been validated. This also happened when the author tried to find the connections between teachers' L2 proficiency and their professional qualifications in EFL education. Due to the uncertainties of the self-assessed L2 proficiency data, this connection looked strained.

Fourth, the author had used qualitative content analysis (MAXQDA) in teachers' L1 use in EFL class. There were six categories in total in corresponding to their L2 use. Interestingly, the L2 use was analyzed in quantitative analysis (SPSS). Although this mixed research method provided more research value, and the significance of L1 research in this article was far less than L2, a research method that mapped qualitative research results into quantitative research for analogy remained to be verified. There was no supporting evidence that the research in L1 and L2 usages are progressive. Besides, no standard rules were given for the quantization of the L1 research results. The author might have put the L1 complexity into consideration because there would be a possibility that teachers would offer various reasons for L1 usages since it is their native language and to categorize the L1 usages would be too subjective (CARUS, A., & OGILVIE, S., 2009). After all, this article put L1 and L2 usages in EFL class into contrastive study, there was a chance that the L1 research results were forcibly classified just for the comparison of L2 research results. 68 answers from the

L1 research had been left out for the reason that they could not co-relate to the categories in L2 research. Therefore, a same method of either qualitative or quantitative for both research would be more proper.

Results and Data Analyses

The data revealed that teachers used L2 more often focusing on the target language rather than class management. L1 was used more on occasions for explanations, classroom discipline and individual supports. Teacher with a higher self-assessed L2 proficiency were likely to use L2 more often in EFL class, and were more likely to possess a higher professional qualification for EFL education.

The research on 'L2 use of primary EFL teaching in L2-related or class management situations' showed that teachers with higher qualifications use L2 more often. Besides, the table indicated that teachers with a post-qualification course in EFL used L2 more often than teachers with EFL major in 'L2 related situations' ($0.36 > 0.31$) and equaled in 'class management situations' (both 0.49). Meanwhile, in the tablet of 'L1 use in L2-related situations', it showed that teachers with no professional EFL training or with post-qualifications tended to use L1 to explain words most (37.5% and 35.0%), making a huge contrast figure with teachers with EFL major (22.3%). While for the purpose of explaining grammar and testing or assessment, teachers with EFL major used more L1 (29.1% and 9.5%) in comparison with teachers with post-qualifications (24.5% and 7.4%) and no training (20% and 2.5%). In the rest situations from the tablet, teachers with EFL major or post qualifications all used L1 less often than teachers with no professional training. This confirmed Dörr's theory backwards, 'a teacher with a higher L2 qualification use L2 more in class'.

To study the relation between L2 proficiency and L2 usages in class, the author used Pearson Correlation Coefficient. It indicated that these variations had a small positive relationship, with 0.29 ($<.001$) and 0.32 ($<.001$) in 'L2-related situations' and 'class management situations', respectively. However, in studying the relation between L2

proficiency and L1 usages in class, by using Spearman, the author found out that only when using L1 for the purpose of giving instructions, it would have a negative correlation with L2 proficiency($r=-.152$) This revealed the possibility that the chances of giving instructions would be higher if teachers' self-assessed L2 proficiency were lower. While giving instructions was considered to be a L1 use situation in the study, it meant that the less L1 use in class, the better a teacher's self-assessed L2 proficiency would be.

From the previous two studies, the author confirmed that less L1 use in class meant a teacher had a higher EFL qualification or a better self-assessed L2 proficiency. So, what was the relation EFL qualification and L2 proficiency? According to Pearson, these two variations had a significant correlation of .03 ($p<.001$), which meant that they shared a positive correlation.

To test the hypotheses this article proposed, the author adopted several steps of data analyses. The data in each link were closely connected, which provided data support for the next link while proving the argument. The final conclusions obtained through the data also confirmed the previous hypotheses and were highly consistent with the theory. This article also proved that Helmkeet, Turnbull and Dörr's theories were mature, test-standing, and could be used cross-wise.

In all, this article had confirmed the idea that in primary EFL education, teacher's L2 proficiency and their qualification mattered a lot in L2 use frequency in class and it would directly affected learners' L2 proficiency. However, the L1 usages in EFL class should not be neglected, since there were supporting evidences that L1 use in class could develop learners' L2 communicative competence (Atkinson,1987; Auerbach,1993). Meanwhile, teachers' qualifications in EFL may not be the only factor that would influence teachers' self-assessed L2 proficiency. Self-confidence, speaking or writing ability, students' feedback could all affect this figure. This would be a research worthy of studying.

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