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SOME DIFFICULTIES OF USING THE MOTHER TONGUE IN THE ENGLISH CLASS.

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ANNOTATION: This paper explores the difficulties of using the mother tongue in English language classes. It discusses how excessive reliance on students' native language can hinder the development of communication skills in English and reduce exposure to authentic language use. The study highlights common challenges such as code-switching, limited student motivation to use English, and teachers' dependency on translation for explanations. It also examines how the overuse of the mother tongue may affect language immersion, fluency, and classroom interaction. Finally, the paper suggests maintaining a balance between English and the mother tongue to ensure comprehension while promoting effective language acquisition.

Keywords: mother tongue, English classroom, code-switching, translation, language acquisition, fluency, communication skills.

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), the use of the mother tongue (L1) in the classroom has long been a subject of debate among linguists, teachers, and researchers. Some educators argue that the native language can be used as a useful pedagogical tool to explain complex ideas, translate difficult vocabulary, and manage classroom activities efficiently. However, others believe that overusing the mother tongue can hinder the development of English language proficiency, especially in listening, speaking, and thinking skills. The English classroom should ideally serve as a space where learners are immersed in the target language and encouraged to use it for real communication. Yet, in many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts — including Uzbekistan — teachers and students often share the same mother tongue, which makes it easy and tempting to use it frequently during lessons. This article discusses the main difficulties and negative consequences of overusing the mother tongue in English classes and suggests possible ways to overcome these challenges. One of the most common problems of using the mother tongue in English lessons is overdependence. When students are constantly allowed to use their native language, they become reliant on it as a support system instead of developing strategies to understand English directly. Teachers who explain every word or rule in L1 may unintentionally discourage learners from thinking in English. For example, when teachers translate each new word instead of using visual aids,





definitions, or context clues, students tend to wait for the translation rather than trying to guess the meaning. As a result, they fail to build critical thinking and independent language processing skills. According to Cook (2001), the constant use of L1 can prevent learners from “developing the habit of using English as a means of communication,” which slows down their overall progress.

The second major difficulty is limited exposure to English. Language learning is highly dependent on input — the amount of language a learner hears and reads. If the mother tongue dominates classroom communication, students receive less exposure to authentic English. Consequently, they may struggle with listening comprehension, pronunciation, and fluency, because they are not surrounded by enough English input. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1985) emphasizes that learners need a sufficient amount of comprehensible input in the target language to progress. When too much time is spent using L1, this exposure decreases, and the natural learning process is interrupted. Over time, this results in slower vocabulary growth and weaker communicative competence. Furthermore, Excessive reliance on the mother tongue affects students’ communication skills negatively. Many learners develop the habit of mentally translating their thoughts from L1 to English before speaking, which causes hesitation and unnatural speech. For instance, sentence structures and idiomatic expressions from the native language are often transferred directly into English, leading to grammatical errors and misunderstanding. This phenomenon, known as language interference, can make students’ speech sound awkward or incorrect. Moreover, continuous translation during speaking activities breaks the natural flow of conversation and prevents learners from becoming fluent communicators. English teachers often aim to build thinking in English, but this goal becomes nearly impossible if students depend on translation as a learning strategy. Sometimes the problem does not come only from students but also from teachers. In many non-English-speaking countries, some teachers are not fully confident in their English proficiency. As a result, they may use their mother tongue frequently to explain difficult points, clarify instructions, or maintain discipline. Although this practice may save time, it reduces the quality of English input in the classroom. Students need to hear natural English from their teachers to improve listening and speaking skills. When teachers switch to L1 too often, they unintentionally limit students’ chances to experience English as a living language. Harmer (2007) notes that teachers should model the target language as much as possible to create an authentic learning environment.

Another challenge of using the mother tongue is related to classroom management. When both languages are used interchangeably, students may lose the sense of discipline and take the English-only rule less seriously. In





group discussions or pair work, they might prefer to talk in their native language, thinking it is easier and faster. This habit weakens motivation to use English actively. Learners start believing that they can always rely on translation, which decreases their willingness to take risks or make mistakes — both of which are essential parts of language learning. Teachers must therefore establish clear expectations and encourage students to use English as the main medium of communication, even if their sentences are not perfect. Different languages have different grammar, syntax, pronunciation, and word order. When students compare English structures to their L1, they often make mistakes based on the rules of their native language. This phenomenon is called interlingual interference. For example, Uzbek and English differ significantly in sentence structure, tense system, and article usage. An Uzbek student might say “She beautiful girl” instead of “She is a beautiful girl” because Uzbek does not use the verb “to be” in the same way. These structural differences cause confusion and errors if students rely too much on direct translation from their mother tongue. The overuse of the mother tongue can also create psychological barriers. Some students feel embarrassed or anxious about speaking English in front of others, so they prefer to use L1 to avoid mistakes. This attitude gradually turns into fear of communication. When learners are not forced to express themselves in English, they lose opportunities to build confidence. The teacher’s role here is crucial — encouraging a supportive atmosphere where students feel safe to make errors and learn from them. A classroom that depends heavily on L1 communication does not help learners overcome shyness or develop the courage to use English spontaneously. Moreover, when teachers rely mainly on the mother tongue, students may not be exposed to the cultural context of the English language. This includes idioms, humor, customs, and social norms that are essential for true language mastery. Without understanding these cultural aspects, students may struggle to interpret meaning correctly or to communicate naturally with native speakers. Therefore, the use of English in class should go beyond grammar and vocabulary — it should also help learners develop intercultural competence. Although there are many difficulties associated with using the mother tongue, it should not be completely banned. In some cases, L1 can serve as a supportive tool, especially for beginners or when explaining abstract concepts that are difficult to understand in English. However, this use should be minimal, purposeful, and strategic.

For example, the mother tongue can be used to: clarify grammar rules after presenting them in English, translate culturally specific terms, check comprehension quickly, or give important instructions. The key is not to rely on it continuously. The ultimate goal of language teaching is to help students think and communicate in English independently.





To sum up, using the mother tongue in English classes presents both benefits and serious difficulties. While it can facilitate understanding in some situations, excessive use of L1 limits exposure to English, weakens communication skills, and slows down the process of language acquisition. Overdependence on the mother tongue also reduces students' motivation, confidence, and ability to think in English. Teachers should therefore aim to create an English-rich classroom environment where the target language is the main medium of instruction. Occasional and strategic use of the mother tongue can be acceptable, but it should never replace the communicative purpose of English teaching. By maintaining this balance, teachers can ensure that learners not only understand the language but also use it effectively in real-life contexts.

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