



An Ethnographic Study on Learners' Use of Mother Tongue in EFL Speaking Classes

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ABSTRACT

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The debate over the importance of the mother tongue (L1) in EFL classrooms remains unresolved. If some researchers and scholars recognize the role of the mother tongue in teaching and learning English, others do not support the use of L1 for both teachers and students in L2 classes. The goal of this research is to present the results of learners' use of L1 (Vietnamese) in English-speaking classes. Classroom observation and a semi-structured interview were designed to be delivered to participants for the study, 45 EFL learners at the basic and intermediate levels of an English language center in Can Tho city, and six of them were invited to attend the interview based on convenience sampling. The study's findings indicated that L1 use was also discovered to be preferred for the following purposes: comprehending teachers' lessons, expressing ideas or responses, translating English words or sentences, interpreting teachers' questions or utterances, building rapport by making jokes, reminding mistakes made by teachers, doing pair work or group work, and chatting with classmates. The results also revealed that Vietnamese can help EFL learners make positive changes in their L2 learning journey.

KEYWORDS:

L1, L2, EFL learners, English, Vietnamese

I. INTRODUCTION

The argument over integrating mother tongue (L1) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is discussed in the previous literature. It has always been controversial whether language teachers should use the students' native tongues in classes where they are studying a second or foreign language (Sharma, 2006: 80). The target language should only be spoken in the English classroom, according to many researchers. Nunan's assertion that "the practitioners who advocate the strong version of communicative language teaching emphasize 'learning to communicate through interaction in the target language'" (Nunan, 1991: 279), which is shared by Sharma (2006: 80). Teaching English through English, as defined by Willis (1981) (cited in Sharma, 2006: 80), also means speaking and using English as much as you can in the classroom. Auerbach (1993: 5) supports the belief that "the more students are exposed to English, the more they will internalize it and begin to think in English; the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it."

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Many researchers and scholars agreed that using mother tongue in EFL courses is essential, contrary to the views of some educators who thought it should be avoided. In many cases, learners' use of L1 can help them acquire L2 faster (Li, et al., 2016). Teachers view the use of their first language (L1) in L2 classrooms as a facilitating tool to enhance their students' language learning progress with more applicable and approachable courses (Al-balawi, 2016). When necessary, it is appropriate to speak in your native tongue in some circumstances (Mahmutoglu & Kicir, 2013). The use of the native language served to improve students' English proficiency (Hawa, et al., 2021).

Many English teachers in Vietnam agree that using students' native languages in class has advantages for both teachers and students. Mother tongue will continue to be crucial to learners' success in learning a foreign language in terms of their sociocultural environment, according to Tran's (2018) research. In addition, a lot of students agree that using their mother tongue is significant when explaining complex vocabulary or conveying in-depth knowledge of specialized subjects (Nguyen, 2021). According to Bui and Nguyen (2014), the L1 is frequently employed as a mediating tool to assist task completion. For Vietnamese teachers, knowing Vietnamese should be seen as a backup rather than a burden (Le, 2022).

Even though the use of the mother tongue in English classes has been accepted and allowed by a number of researchers, learners' use of the mother tongue has not received much attention in the Vietnamese teaching context. Also, according to an ethnographic study conducted in the context of language teaching and learning in Vietnam, little is known about how learners' use of their target language varies in relation to using their mother tongue in EFL classes. Furthermore, there is not much research conducted in the context of EFL communication classes, especially speaking classes. Hence, this research aims to fill the gaps in which few studies are carried out in that area in Vietnam regarding the use of learners' mother tongue in EFL speaking classes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The role of L1 in English education

Education has the potential to help students develop their own independent thought (Noormohamadi, 2008). Allowing and encouraging students to form their own opinions and interpretations of the world around them is important. When English is taught as a foreign language and often a core and compulsory subject, the role of L1 must be considered carefully.

The mother tongue is important for learning the target language, according to Kelleher (2013). He emphasized that the mother tongue plays a positive role in the process of learning a language rather than focusing on the mother tongue's negative impact on learning. The mother tongue assisted the students in learning the second language, according to the study's findings. A study on the impact of mother language on speech output was done by Suliman (2014). His research demonstrated that students' ability to produce speech is hindered by their mother tongue.

The use of mother tongues in foreign language classes is, of course, discouraged by some traditional studies, which claim that doing so hinders students' capacity to learn a second language (Macaro, 2009). However, using one's mother tongue has some benefits from the viewpoint of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Glenn (2011) claims that it will enable students to fully use their language skills while also maintaining the cultural values that traditional languages bring.

2.2. Learners' mother tongue in EFL classes

Although many researchers and scholars believe that a mother tongue hinders the progress of second language learning, practice has shown that it does not hinder but also supports the process of second language acquisition effectively. According to Macaro (1997), who shared the aforementioned opinion, utilizing one's mother tongue has the following advantages:

1. The mother tongue is very useful in guiding classroom activities.
2. The translation of some words is necessary to check the students' understanding.

3. Teacher feedback to students in the native language is sometimes necessary.

4. To maintain discipline in the classroom, a mother tongue is a useful tool.

With the assistance of their first language, students can not only comprehend the lesson better but also communicate with teachers more effectively (Florence Ma, 2012). Using a first language in a second language lesson could benefit students by lessening their anxiety and cognitive burden (Bruen & Kelly, 2017).

Some advantages of adopting the mother tongue when teaching foreign languages at a high school in Chitwan, Nepal, were also addressed in a study by Sharma (2010). This study involved 20 teachers and 100 students. Data gathered through questionnaires and interviews has demonstrated that the mother tongue helps students learn English more quickly, efficiently, and comfortably.

According to Jadallah and Hasan (2011), who were referring to the cultural aspect, culture can have a significant impact on how well someone picks up a second language. To help students embrace the distinctions of the new language while keeping the language's essence in their native tongue, teachers can use the mother tongue to highlight the cultural parallels and differences between the two languages.

2.3. Vietnamese usage in EFL speaking classes

2.3.1. Teachers' attitude

Research by Lewis and McCook (2002) in the Vietnamese context has demonstrated that teachers frequently transcode the language into Vietnamese to guarantee that students comprehend the course knowledge. Nguyen (2013)'s research demonstrates that teachers use Vietnamese to facilitate their students' easier assimilation of new vocabulary. According to Le (2022)'s research, teachers' use of Vietnamese is sometimes purely out of habit and other times reflects an underestimating of students' proficiency. A survey on the opinions of Vietnamese teachers and students regarding the usage of Vietnamese in foreign language classes was undertaken by Anh (2012). The findings demonstrated that both teachers and students thought that using Vietnamese was necessary.

The following are some reasons why Vietnamese teachers can successfully employ the Vietnamese-English bilingual approach, according to Grant and Nguyen (2017). First of all, Vietnamese can be used to direct activities and spark interest in learning a second language. Second, using Vietnamese can save teachers time as there is not enough time in the curriculum to fully explain everything in English. Third, it is more practical to use the mother tongue and make sure that every student understands in a class with a large number of students. This clarifies the instructions and fosters a positive rapport between the teacher and the language learner.

In the research of Ngan (2019), the findings revealed that L1 in the Vietnamese EFL classroom served a wide range of functions. Teachers often switched to L1 either for

academic and managerial purposes or to interact with their students. The most common function of L1 was to “translate words and sentences” to make sure the learners managed to grasp the full meaning of a particular vocabulary and its eventual acquisition. All the teachers in this research did not seem to have any firm policy regarding the use of L1 and L2 in actual teaching practice. This implies that they did not have a clear guidance on how to balance the use L1 or L2 in the classroom.

2.3.2. Students' perception

Pham (2015) has demonstrated that transliteration happens in classes for a variety of reasons based on his research with undergraduate English majors in business communication in Vietnam. The focus group interview method was used to gather data from five groups of English for Business Communication majors, ranging in age from 18 to 21. Although they recommend that there should be a balance between the two languages, the results indicate that the majority of students have a good attitude toward using bilingualism.

According to (Nguyen, 2021)'s research, students, to a certain extent depending on the subject and discipline, are generally pleased about teachers using Vietnamese in English lessons. In specialized courses on linguistics, literature, translation and interpretation, teaching strategies, and grammar, students desire teachers to use Vietnamese. For many students, clarifying difficult words and vocabulary or conveying unique knowledge of a specialized subject in one's mother tongue is vital. Students, on the other hand, also anticipate that English will be employed more in language skill classes, such as listening, speaking, reading, etc., to enhance language proficiency and foster a more conducive learning atmosphere.

2.3.3. Drawbacks and solutions of using Vietnamese in EFL classes.

According to Bui and Nguyen (2014), the interference of Vietnamese may cause learners to employ English structure inaccurately, and students may find it challenging to talk accurately in English or practice speaking because they lack access to an environment where English is spoken. There should be limitations on the usage of Vietnamese in EFL classrooms, if it is to be used at all. In a foreign language class, the native tongue should thus only be employed if there are no other alternatives. Additionally, English should still be used as the primary language in the classroom and should only be used as a tool to break down language barriers.

In the study of Phan (2021), Vietnamese has certain disadvantages as well, such as limiting students' linguistic development and making them passive, uninspired individuals. Most students also learn that too much exposure to L1 in class may deprive them of opportunities to use and develop their second language.

2.3.4. Related studies

Research on the role of MT in EFL classes reveals certain situations in which MT should be employed, in addition to the proportional variety of its use. Timucin and Baytar (2015) for example, lists several different positive uses of MT in L2 classrooms, i.e translation, checking understanding, explaining procedures and giving directions, explaining grammar and managing the class. Alshehri (2017) supports this by suggesting that translation can be used positively in a number of activities, such as explaining vocabulary and developing rapport with students, translating new vocabulary and preparing for tasks.

The perception of teachers and students is a key finding of studies on the use of MT in EFL programs. Mahmutoglu and Kicir's (2013) in Turkish context revealed that both teachers and students support using the mother tongue in EFL classrooms, but differ on the frequency. Teachers believe it should be used occasionally, while students suggest it should be used regularly. L2 use should be increased. According to Anh's (2012) study on the views of Vietnamese university professors regarding using Vietnamese to teach English, there are certain situations where the proper application of MT is required. Almost all of the participants agreed that MT should be used in their classes. For them, their MT was a vital component of their teaching strategy and had potential to be helpful in the classroom.

To have further insightful views about teachers and students' attitudes on the use of MT in EFL classes, the findings of Hawa et al. (2021) revealed that the students in the low and intermediate levels of English proficiency indicated high positive acceptance towards the use of the mother tongue in the English classroom because it helped them learn English. On the other hand, the students in the advanced level showed a negative perception toward its use. Manel et al. (2019) research in the context of Algeria showed learners have a positive attitude towards the teachers' use of code-switching. Specifically, Debreli and Oyman (2016) discovered that students with lower levels of L2 competency had more favorable attitudes toward the usage of L1. This part has reviewed the literature related to teachers and students' perceptions on the use of mother tongue in English classes. Additionally, the studies mentioned above have centered functions of mother tongue using in EFL classrooms. However, there is not much research conducted in the context of EFL communication classes, especially speaking classes. This research aims to fill the gaps in which few studies are carried out in that area in Vietnam regarding the use of learners' mother tongue in EFL speaking classes.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Aim and Research Questions

The purposes of this study are twofold. Firstly, the study focuses on investigating cases where EFL learners use Vietnamese in speaking classes. Secondly, it explores learners' changes in the process of L1 – L2 in the EFL

speaking classes. To achieve these goals, two research questions guided the study:

1. In what cases do EFL learners use Vietnamese in speaking classes?
2. How has the learners' L2 changed through the use of their mother tongue in the EFL classroom?

3.2. Participants

The participants of this study are 45 EFL learners of an English language center in Can Tho city based on convenience sampling (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

For the purpose of conducting the research, learners taking basic, and intermediate English communication classes and the teachers teaching these classes will be contacted with a polite request to accept the researcher's presence in their classes for the observations. Six learners from the classes observed will also be randomly invited for interviews.

3.3. Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

The current study uses an ethnographic research paradigm to examine how learners use their first language in EFL classes and how their L2 changes as a result. The researcher used a comprehensive approach in which the classrooms of English language teachers were observed during three consecutive lessons, and learners' L1 use was analyzed quantitatively by using Raymond Padilla's Unfolding Matrix method from Nguyen (2018). After the classroom observations, six students were chosen at random to take part in semi – structured interviews.

3.3.1. Classroom observations.

In ethnographic studies, the activities of the group are examined through the systematic collection of naturalistic data and participant interviews regarding the observations (Anton, 1996). Prior to anything else, the participants were made aware of the study's purpose and obtained consent to take part. The researcher visited classrooms as observer and used an observation checklist to examine quantitatively learners' L1 use during the learning hour. The observer filled out the observation checklist whenever the learner use L1 while learning. The observation data of the classrooms have been collected through the collection of this information.

3.3.2. Semi-structured interview.

The interview is regarded as having powerful data because it allows interaction between interviewers and interviewees and gives interviewers the opportunity to inquire about or clarify responses (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The semi-structured interview method was used because it promotes open communication and is less intrusive to people being interviewed. The interview begins with an overall conversation of the subject before moving on to detailed details (Galletta & Cross, 2013). A brief overview of the study and the interview's purpose was given before the interview sessions began. The primary reasons of learners' L2 changes while using their L1 in EFL classrooms were then looked into. For further analysis, the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

In this study, a semi-structured interview fulfilled two main purposes. First, the participant and the researcher went over the checklist and looked at any L1 use the researcher had noticed among the learners. Second, the interview focused on clarifying the underlying reasons of the instances of L1 use that were acknowledged in the first section. In-depth questions also looked into how learners' L2 use of L1 changed during the classes.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings concerning the use of the Vietnamese language in different cases by EFL learners in communication classes are presented. This study also focuses on to what extent the learners' L2 has changed through the use of their mother tongue in the EFL classroom.

4.1. Cases that EFL learners use Vietnamese

In a variety of cases, Vietnamese learners have the tendency to use their first language (L1) in their speech or conversations in the classroom. It can be listed as (a) to comprehend the lessons, (b) to express ideas or responses, (c) to translate English words or sentences, (d) to interpret the teacher's questions or utterances, (e) to interact with the teacher by making jokes or reminding them of their mistakes while writing on the board, and (f) to interact with classmates by chatting or working in pairs or groups.

4.1.1. To comprehend the teacher's lessons

In the Vietnamese context, the demand for thorough understanding of the lessons becomes the learners' top priority. Due to the fact that English is the dominant language in the classroom, learners may need to use their first language (L1) right away if they have trouble understanding something.

EFL learners use Vietnamese to ask their teacher what they do not understand, namely a new vocabulary, a complex grammatical structure, or a pronunciation cluster. In this way, students can quickly understand the knowledge that the teacher wants to convey. Fifteen coded quotations from classroom observation were recorded, some of them were appeared, namely “*Cô ơi, ‘trader’ là gì vậy cô? (What is ‘traders’, teacher?)*”, “*Cô hỏi em CÁI GÌ đúng không cô?*” (*You ask about WHAT, don’t you?*), “*Em hiểu nhưng em không biết cách phát âm /z/ sao cho đúng*” (*I understand but I cannot pronounce the sound /z/*), “*Cô nói lại lần nữa giúp em ạ?*” (*Can you do it again, please?*) and others. Also, all interviewees responded with the same opinion as above. Three representatives of the respondents are presented below:

“*Sometimes, when a Vietnamese teacher gives a lecture, there will be words that I do not understand, so I will ask the teacher again in Vietnamese to understand the English meaning.*” (R1)

The fourth respondent cannot deny the fact that he cannot understand the lesson; part of the problem is because of his limited listening ability. Therefore, it is inevitable to

ask the teacher in Vietnamese to understand the missing content:

"I often use Vietnamese when I don't understand anything, I don't understand because my listening ability is not very good, then I will ask the teacher again so that I can understand what the word is." (R3)

4.1.2. To express ideas or responses

Due to the limited language ability of some learners. They do not have enough vocabulary of a certain topic, common grammatical structures, and synonyms and antonyms. That prevents them from generating new ideas as well as making it difficult to answer the teacher's English questions. They can hear and understand the teacher's English questions. However, answering accurately and confidently is something they have not been able to do due to the lack of information mentioned above *"Teacher: What do you usually do to relax at night? - Learner: Ăn khuya ạ. (Have a supper)"*. Therefore, they need the teacher's help to achieve their communication goals. They will ask for teachers' help in Vietnamese.

"Those are the cases where I have an idea but I don't know how to express it in English. Then I will speak Vietnamese. At this time, I will ask the teacher to develop the idea of Vietnamese into English." (R4)

Most of these activities are done while students work in groups or pairs. They think that using Vietnamese in this case is optimal and saves time. According to the interviewees, they also agree that using Vietnamese to ask for help from teachers to create new ideas or simply answer English questions is common in English language classes; they themselves often do that, especially in group or pair activities. They will choose such contexts to make them less afraid to ask questions directly in front of the class.

"When I don't know how to express ideas in English, I often ask the teacher for help, I often ask in Vietnamese. I particularly ask for teacher's helps when my partners and I are discussing, one asks and one answers." (R6)

4.1.3. To translate English words or sentences

In a 90-minute lesson by observation, the activity that takes up a lot of the teacher's communication lesson time is teaching vocabulary and grammar. In these activities, teachers often interact with learners by asking the meaning of words or asking learners to translate a word, phrase or sentence. The frequency of this happens in most classes, including basic and intermediate classes. Some of evidences that recorded in classroom observation are *"Teacher: 'Famous', everyone, 'famous.', what does it mean? Learner: Nổi tiếng (Famous)"*, or *"Teacher: The next sentence is number 2. How do you translate it? Learner: Anh ấy cao, ... (He is tall...)"*.

All basic respondents reported that the teacher frequently inquired about the Vietnamese meanings of the

words in the textbook from them and their peers. To make sure learners are understanding the proper context, teachers occasionally ask students to interpret an English phrase, question, or sentence. Learners would translate from Vietnamese to English in such circumstances.

"I myself have a pretty good vocabulary, so when the teacher asked me the meaning of the words, I was one of my classmates who quickly said the Vietnamese meanings of those words. Sometimes, I even translate English sentences at the teacher's request." (R2)

"I often see teachers who, in addition to asking the meaning of English words, also check if we understand the question or not by asking us to translate long English questions into Vietnamese." (R1)

In intermediate class, learners are sometimes asked to translate words from English to Vietnamese. However, the frequency of recording is not great; only difficult or uncommon words are required by the teacher to translate. Instead, learners are asked to translate the task instructions to ensure all students understand and complete the requirements correctly.

"Teachers often ask a classmate to read the task request, and then he or she will translate that sentence into Vietnamese to make sure we understand the task correctly. But later, the teacher didn't ask like that anymore; she asked yes-or-no questions to check if we understood the request." (R6)

4.1.4. To interpret teacher's questions or utterances

In addition to allowing learners to participate in communication activities such as working in groups or pairs, teachers also spend time interacting with learners to check understanding as well as learners' progress. Therefore, teachers will find many ways to interact with individual learners such as asking English questions to an individual student while they work in groups or in pairs, or asking directly in front of the class, or run activities, or games to create context for questioning.

By classroom observation, most of the learners in the intermediate level class will be able to answer and respond quite well to the questions. A few learners at basic level will need more time to understand the question and answer, and they will even use Vietnamese to interpret teacher's questions or utterances or even ask the teacher again for detail explanations. *"Learner: Sử dụng 'learn' thì sao ạ? (How about using 'learn'?)", "Chúng em dùng 'learn' trong trường hợp này được không cô? (Can we use 'learn' in this case, teacher?)"* or *"Learner: Có nghĩa là cô muốn Ý thầy là nghe rồi khoanh vào đáp án đúng phải không thầy? (You mean that listen and then circle the correct answer, don't you, teacher?)".* Six out of six learners both basic and intermediate level interviewed shared the same opinion.

Respondent "Six", an intermediate learner shared:

"...I use Vietnamese to ask my teacher some questions that I do not understand or something I want to know in advance."

While intermediate learners use Vietnamese to ask teachers about more advanced knowledge, basic learners sometimes answer the teacher's English questions in Vietnamese as well as ask the meaning of the questions in English. Vietnamese language to make sure they understand what the teacher wants to convey.

Respondent "Three", a basic student shared:

"...When my teacher interacts with me, he asks me something in English. However, to answer it, I don't have vocabulary to answer, so I will speak in Vietnamese."

4.1.5. To build rapport by making jokes

A fun and intimate lesson is something that many teachers and learners want. When class members are closer to each other, learning to communicate will be more convenient. Therefore, there are many cases where students make jokes during lessons to create a joyful and friendly atmosphere. In the above cases, students mostly use Vietnamese to interact with the whole class and especially the teacher. *"Teacher: Let's practice. What do I look like? - Learner: Cô muốn nghe sự thật hay nói dối? (Do you want to hear the truth or lie?) - Teacher: Definitely, ... the truth, please! - Learner: "Cô giáo của tôi không... cao và gầy. (My teacher is not... tall and slim.)"*

Most respondents mentioned that they sometimes used Vietnamese to poke fun at the teacher or tell funny stories to make the teacher-student relationship closer.

Respondent "Four", an intermediate student stated that:

"I either make the teacher laugh or my friends laugh or I try to be funny to make the class less stressful and of course I make jokes in Vietnamese. Imagine, if I tell the jokes in English, I am not sure that all the members can get what I want to convey."

The other two learners did not participate in creating laughter, but they enjoyed the fun and humorous moments of the class.

Respondent "Six" also liked joining a class with funny moments and shared that:

"I'm introverted, so I'm not one to joke around, but my classmates like to do it in class. I feel happy, and other friends are also very happy to react to these funny moments... Although my classmates are quite good at English, to create a joyful atmosphere, speaking Vietnamese to tease is still the most contextual."

For basic learners, they also enjoy learning in a friendly and fun environment. Therefore, when there is an opportunity to tease each other or, especially, to make fun of the teacher, they will not miss it.

"We're currently not good at English, and we don't have the vocabulary to express our jokes, so we

often speak Vietnamese to create laughter in the classroom. Speaking Vietnamese, everyone understands, so the effect is very good... Even the classmates made fun of the teacher while she is lecturing or asking questions." (R2)

After attending classes and semi – structured interview, both basic and intermediate, there are cases where learners speak Vietnamese to create laughter. Most of those cases came from the student's position.

4.1.6. To remind teacher for mistakes

There are times when a teacher makes a mistake, such as misinterpreting a word or idea that they have accurately taught. Vietnamese will also be used by the learners to ask the teacher to correct it. *"Learner: Thưa thầy! Động từ trong câu này có -s ở cuối không? (Excuse-me teacher! Does the verb in this sentence have -s at the end?) - Teacher: Sure. Oh, I forget to add it. Many thanks. As seen, incidents of teachers making mistakes are infrequent. Even if they speak and read English well, Vietnamese teachers occasionally make mistakes on the whiteboard, such as spelling or grammatical mistakes. The above case applies to both basic and elementary classes. There is no similar record of teaching hours for foreign teachers. When encountering such a situation, learners choose to tell the teacher that they have made a mistake, and often they use Vietnamese to notify the teacher.*

"I reminded the teacher twice, both times when she wrote a yes or no question. Her mouth read 'Does she...' but she wrote 'Do she...'. Or once she wrote the sentence 'it's very convenient' which she wrote as 'it's very convenience'. She used the wrong word, so I reminded her. I used Vietnamese to remind her, both times." (R3)

For intermediate learners, although they can use English to remind teachers, they think that using Vietnamese will be faster and more optimal, and basic students, even though English is not fluent, have the same opinion.

"Sometimes, when the teacher writes the words with wrong spelling or writes the verb without -s in sentences, I will tell him that he makes mistakes. When I notice the teacher making mistakes, I frequently speak Vietnamese right away because of how quickly I react. I can also remind him in English, but I speak Vietnamese swiftly." (R6)

4.1.7. To pair work or group work

In addition to teachers, the object of frequent interaction with students learning to communicate is their classmates. As mentioned above, teachers often have to organize activities that require interaction such as teamwork, pairs, team games, these are the cases where students often use English with their classmates. It is observed that most of the learners in the basic class usually discuss in groups or pairs in English; however, they also often use Vietnamese to ask each other about words they forget the meaning or pronunciation of words. Sometimes they also use Vietnamese

to argue when they do not understand the requirements of the task. "Learner: *Ý tôi là tôi muốn nói rằng tôi đã đọc tiểu thuyết, nhưng tôi quên mất từ 'tiểu thuyết' (I mean I want to say I read the novel, but I forgot the word 'novel')*" or "Từ 'tiểu thuyết' được phát âm như thế nào? (How is the word 'novel' pronounced?)"

Respondent "Three" said that:

"I usually discuss in groups or pairs, depending on the requirements of the task and as arranged by the teacher. We often discuss in English after being suggested by the teacher. However, during discussion, we often speak Vietnamese together when one of our friends doesn't remember the meaning of a word or forgets the structure to express it. At that time, we will ask each other and support each other in Vietnamese."

Similar to basic classes, intermediate students frequently use Vietnamese when speaking in class. They had to brainstorm and communicate their ideas as a group because of the lengthy discussion period and the complex topics. They must communicate in Vietnamese in order to fulfill the task's requirements before working together to edit and translate. Additionally, when they disagree, they frequently quarrel in Vietnamese. In this instance, using English does not adequately explain the argument's main points.

Respondent "Six" also added that:

"We frequently disagree while debating the details of the requirement. As a result, we argue in Vietnamese frequently to express our opinions. I give up when I speak English in this manner."

4.1.8. To chat with classmates

According to the data from the classroom observation, this case was also recorded in many classes, both basic and intermediate. Learners take advantage of the time to work in groups or pairs, after they discuss or complete the requirements of the task, they will chat with their groupmates in Vietnamese. Explaining this case, the interviewed trainees said that they wanted to know more about their classmates, but because they focused on studying, they did not have the opportunity to chat. Therefore, they will use Vietnamese to know more about each other, and using Vietnamese helps them understand each other better, faster and more conveniently. In addition, three out of four learners who have been taking basic classes said that they will sometimes try to work in groups or pairs to talk in Vietnamese about some topics outside of the lesson to understand each other better. Respondent 1 who has the same sharing stated that: *"Sometimes I can't control myself, so accidentally I will speak Vietnamese with my next to friend or many times we will chat in Vietnamese if we finish the task early."*

The above case also occurs in the intermediate classes but was recorded with less frequency. Three out of three intermediate learners think that using Vietnamese after working in groups or pairs is inevitable, it is just that at this level, everyone will try to limit Vietnamese, instead of

expressing ideas in English if they can. Respondent 6 shared: *"I want to speak a lot of English, but when I talk to my friends in class, I am afraid that my classmates will not fully understand, so I use Vietnamese, but we do not speak much Vietnamese because the teacher does not encourage that."*

EFL learners believe that employing Vietnamese to communicate is the best option for fully comprehending the information that the other side wants to convey.

4.2. Learners' L2 changes when using Vietnamese in the EFL classroom

Almost every learner has their own purpose when learning English, an international language popular in many countries. However, most of them agree that the purpose of their communication classes is to improve their listening and speaking skills, improve their pronunciation as well as strengthen their confidence when communicating in English, especially when talking to foreigners. Achieving their goal of successful communication requires more or less using Vietnamese because of their habit of using their mother tongue, Vietnamese classmates, teachers and the surrounding environment. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the change of their second language in the Vietnamese-speaking classroom by themselves.

The data obtained from the interviewees showed that they all agreed that their English-speaking ability has improved. Three basic learners out of six interviewees said that they made a lot of progress in terms of vocabulary and structure. Teachers use Vietnamese to teach the above content to make the lesson easier to understand, the learners easily interact with teachers to ask about the content they do not understand and most importantly, they are comfortable, not afraid of being left behind.

Respondent "Two", a basic learner stated that

The first few days, I couldn't say anything at all. Little by little, I can speak English more and more. In the early days, he used Vietnamese a lot. I am afraid that when I go to school, the teacher will use English completely. But without studying, he said that in the first days he would use Vietnamese a little bit, from then on, I was more confident, absorbing knowledge about vocabulary and grammar easier.

Respondent "Five", an intermediate learner also said that:

Also, thanks to using Vietnamese in the mentioned cases, I understand the requirements and instructions of the teacher, from there I try to fulfill those requirements in English, I can speak more English, especially during foreign teachers' hours.

In addition, progress is highly dependent on the duration of the course. In fact, if you have only learned the seventh session out of twenty - four sessions, the progress is not too obvious. They can only hear and understand the question, answer the question but not react quickly, or the sentence structure is incomplete. A learner who has studied for fourteen sessions thinks that she can understand and

answer questions quite completely and fluently. Six out of six interviewees all agreed that their communication skills improved (vocabulary, sentence structure, listening skills, pronunciation, and confidence) after being invited for the second interview even though they still used Vietnamese in class.

Respondent "Six", an intermediate learner stated that

After the lessons, I think Vietnamese can help me because it helps me as a bridge to help me connect with English. I can use it to understand English. Although these two courses are short, I think I am more confident than before. I know more vocabulary and expression structure, can communicate well. Before going out, I met foreigners, I felt very scared, but now I can communicate with foreigners, listen to people answer questions, so I feel very happy.

Respondent "Three", a basic learner believed that

I find my English is better than before. Because like every day, of course, when I go to school, I also learn some new structures, some new questions. I use Vietnamese so that it supports the process of learning English. Like I will use Vietnamese so I know a few more synonyms or some similar question to support and develop my English ability in class.

Respondent "One", another basic learner stated that

My English has changed for the better. My pronunciation has improved. I'm more confident. At that time, I was not confident at all, saying I was afraid of being wrong. Fear of being wrong should be self-deprecating and dare not speak. I'm afraid people will laugh. Now I have confidence, I can stand, I give presentations or I can speak English with the teacher a little.

The interviewees all agreed that the regular use of the target language they want to master in the classroom is clear after two interviews, the first and second of which were separated by around seven sessions. They do, however, more or less carry that practice into the classroom and use it to communicate with teachers or other learners because they are accustomed to doing so in Vietnamese contexts. They become less nervous and more confident when speaking or engaging part in class activities as a result. If learners wish to improve their communication skills, they should use Vietnamese appropriately and avoid from overusing it.

To conclude, the findings of the interview revealed that learners believe that their English communication can change in a positive way even though they have been using Vietnamese in their learning process.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the present study, the majority of students used L1 to some extent in the classroom. They mainly used L1 for translating, for interpreting teacher or peers' utterances, and preparing for certain tasks. The finding of this study is aligned with previous studies (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Centeno-

Cortés & Jiménez Jiménez, 2004; Hall & Cook, 2013; Alshehri et al., 2017). They all reported the use of L1 for translating new words, preparing for tasks, and to scaffold L2 communication in language learning situations. The activities are meant to assist students in understanding and applying the information presented in the lesson, which is the session's main objective.

It is clear that EFL students, including intermediate and basic level students, from beginners to advanced students, consider the use of L1 in communication class essential and see it as a tool to help them understand and practice L2. However, the use of Vietnamese must be done in moderation and only in necessary cases, without excessive abuse. This is incompatible with the previous work of Mouhanna (2009) and Hawa et al. (2021), which indicated that beginner students showed more positive attitudes towards the use of their mother tongue in EFL classrooms compared to advanced students. In their findings, they argue that the higher the English proficiency, the less likely students are to be exposed to L1 in the classroom.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the use of mother tongue in the teaching and learning of English, and the majority of them focus on key topics like how teachers perceive the use of mother tongue in EFL classes like the study of Al-balawi (2016) or how students perceive the use of mother tongue in EFL classrooms like the study investigated by Hawa et al., (2021) or Le (2022) as well as the use of both teachers' and students' mother tongues in English lessons, but the research primarily focuses on teachers like the study of Alshehri et al., (2017). In order to understand the habits of the participants and develop measures to encourage them in using this language, the current study focuses on cases where students employ their mother tongue in an English communication class. The study also examined whether and how students' use of Vietnamese in class affected their English.

This research examines the use of L1 by EFL learners and their changes towards L1 use in the context of communication classes. The findings reveal that learners believe that English should be the main language as well as the target language used in the classroom with the assistance of L1. The results also show that learners use L1 for some functions in EFL speaking classes, such as comprehending teachers' lessons, expressing ideas or responses, translating English words or sentences, interpreting teacher's questions or utterances, building rapport by making jokes, reminding mistakes made by teachers, doing pair work or group work, and chatting with classmates. The findings also report that the majority of the learners use L1 mainly for understanding the lessons taught by asking their teachers what they are not clear during the lessons, and expressing ideas or making responses for communication topics or questions.

The findings also show that both basic and intermediate students agree that using Vietnamese in communication classes will help students learn more

comfortably. They may try to use English to communicate in the classroom; However, using Vietnamese saves time and anyone can understand, avoiding missing information. In addition, Vietnamese helps L2 students improve their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and confidence when answering questions and making presentations in front of the class. When they don't remember vocabulary or are not sure if their English ideas are grammatically correct or if their pronunciation is correct, they use Vietnamese to ask for help from their teachers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of Vietnamese in the communication class contributes to helping students' English change in a positive manner.

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