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Perspectives of Teaching in English in Gagauzia in Moldova *Moldova Gagauzya'da İngilizce Öğretim Perspektifleri*

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Abstract

Gagauzia in Moldova is a multilingual autonomous region. This region is a multilingual region where besides of English language pupils study Russian, Romanian and Gagauzian languages. Recently, the ratio of foreign languages studied at the schools has changed dramatically in favor of the English language. The new language policy should also ensure that learning of multiple languages among students takes place in a protected perspective and create a positive outcome for them. Furthermore, EFL educators must ensure that they effectively prepare learners with various language skills that need to integrate into the multilingual society effectively. This can be accomplished through training individuals to respond appropriately to the sensitive linguistic and cultural needs of other people that they interact with. It is considerable to acknowledge that people live in a multilingual society. Therefore, how individuals cultivate the process of teaching and learning language must take into account the multilingual perspectives of the real world. This article discusses the definition and context of multilingualism, ways in which individuals can effectively interact with others while predominantly using English and accepting the reality that multilingualism has a massive impact on our lives. The article also discusses the importance of changing the current educational approaches and government policies to match the developing multilingual patterns in regions that attract mass migration. Above all, the article looks forward to developing new ways in which these ideas can be applied to help future language learning, teaching, and assessment to provide improved learning outcomes for all language learning students.

Keywords: Gagauzia, language teaching in Gagauzia, language teaching, foreign language teaching, language learning.

Öz

Moldova'daki Gagauzya çok dilli özerk bir bölgedir. Bu bölge, İngilizce dil öğrencilerinin yanı sıra Rusça, Rumence ve Gagauzca dillerinin konuşulduğu çok dilli bir bölgedir.

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Son zamanlarda, okullarda çalışılan yabancı dillerin oranı İngilizce lehine önemli ölçüde değişmiştir. Yeni dil politikası ayrıca, öğrenciler arasında birden fazla dil öğrenmenin korumalı bir perspektifte gerçekleşmesini ve onlar için olumlu bir sonuç yaratmasını sağlamalıdır. Ayrıca, EFL eğitimcileri çok dilli topluma etkili bir şekilde entegre olması gereken çeşitli dil becerilerine sahip öğrencileri etkili bir şekilde hazırlamalarını sağlamalıdır. Bu, bireylerin, etkileşim kurdukları diğer insanların hassas dilsel ve kültürel ihtiyaçlarına uygun şekilde cevap vermeleri için eğitilerek başarılabilir. İnsanların çok dilli bir toplumda yaşadığını kabul etmek önemlidir. Bu nedenle, bireylerin dil öğretme ve öğrenme sürecini nasıl geliştirdikleri, gerçek dünyanın çok dilli bakış açılarını dikkate almalıdır. Bu makalede, çokdilliliğin tanımı ve bağlamı, bireylerin ağırlıklı olarak İngilizce kullanırken ve çokdilliliğin hayatlarımız üzerinde büyük bir etkisi olduğu gerçeğini kabul ederken diğerleriyle etkili bir şekilde etkileşime girme yolları tartışılmaktadır. Makale ayrıca, kitlesel göçü çeken bölgelerdeki gelişmekte olan çok dilli kalıplarla eşleşmek için mevcut eğitim yaklaşımlarını ve hükümet politikalarını değiştirmenin önemini de tartışıyor. Her şeyden önce, makale bu fikirlerin gelecekteki dil öğrenimi, öğretimi ve değerlendirmesine tüm dil öğrenimi öğrencilerine daha iyi öğrenme sonuçları sağlamak için uygulanabileceği yeni yollar geliştirmeyi dört gözle bekliyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gagauzya, Gagauzya'da dil öğretimi, dil öğretimi, Yabancı Dil öğretimi, dil öğrenimi.

1. Introduction

Moldova is among the small multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual countries around the world. Its state language is Romanian. In the Northern and central parts of the country, most schools are Romanian; southern Moldova uses Russian, while Gagauzia represents an autonomous and essential population settlement in the country. The Gagauzian population is of Turkish origin. The Gagauzians speak the Turkish language very well. However, their children attend either Romanian or Russian schools according to their will and their parents' desires. Nationalities such as Ukrainians, Russians, Roma, Albanians, Greeks, and Bulgarians, among others, live in Gagauzia. Several Gagauzian families speak more than three languages, depending on the parents' origin and educational level, among other factors. At school, diversity creates many communication complications, and when learning a foreign language (Schmidtke & Yekelchyk, 2016). Previous research has shown that to enhance integration in a country, there is a need to have a unified language that will be used by all people. This enhances integration among the various races in the country. As such, a national language is a symbol of unity in a country. Bilingualism undermines the development of a national language (Burnham & Pina, 1990).

Many politicians in Gagauzia directly refer to the region as multi-ethnic, for which there are reasons. The language situation in Gagauzia is complex and diverse. Gagauzia has three official languages: Gagauzian, Moldovan and Russian. Correspondence with authorities, enterprises, organizations and institutions lo-

cated outside Gagauzia is carried out in Moldovan and Russian. National and language preferences of residents of different nationalities often do not coincide and differ in the spread of bilingualism and trilingualism, which vary depending on many factors and situations. Gagauz is the native language of the majority of the population. For many residents of the autonomy, in particular in the cities of the autonomy, Russian is actually the native language. Children in the Autonomous region are still taught in Russian, although the attitude of the Moldovan authorities to this situation is ambiguous.

English has become the most studied foreign language in schools in Gagauzia. At present, English is the most widely studied foreign language in primary and secondary schools in Gagauzia, followed by French and German. Statistics indicate that every year the number of students who want to learn English in Gagauzia increases. Many politicians advocate the development of English in the region. For this purpose, various seminars, courses for teachers are held, and various programs in English are supported.

It can also be noted that the way of teaching English is gradually changing in the region. The Ministry of education makes the main task of acquiring communication skills in English, not just understanding grammar and reading texts. Following the program, many teachers use new technologies and create a language environment in the classroom, encouraging students to speak in English as often as possible.

2. Literary Review

In the modern world, knowledge of English is equated to elementary, basic knowledge. This is as important as knowing your native language, being able to use a computer and smartphone. English today is absolutely necessary for everyone. Even in many developed countries, from France to Japan, there are problems with English proficiency due to incorrect state language policy. But there are the most positive examples: the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and all the countries of Scandinavia. They know English as a foreign language best, and at the same time these countries are among the top ten best countries in the world in terms of economic development and comfort for life. English is developing in Gagauzia, but still not as fast as we would like. The complexity of the relationship between the region and the government of Moldova slows down the development of English in Gagauzia. In Gagauzia, problems with the development of the Gagauz language have not been solved, which is a more important problem for the region. Therefore, this ambiguity makes its own adjustments to the development of the English language.

According to Benton (2020), multilingualism is a situation where individuals use two or more languages to achieve a common objective in a similar setting. In such a context, teachers are faced with the challenge of having to accommodate a classroom with students from diverse religious, language, and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the use of a Russian or Romanian language for teaching and learning is not practical. Problems also arise if any particular teacher does not know the language used by students for learning. In cases where the teaching and learning process uses either Romanian or Russian language, teachers must avoid language discrimination by giving all students equal chances to learn using their respective languages.

To avoid encountering these problems, teachers are trained on how to address various linguistic challenges and effective use of vocabularies by employing strategies such as mime, antonyms, synonyms, and gestures, among others. These strategies help teachers to accommodate the various learning needs of diverse students. Although the Language Center policy only encourages the use of English for instructional purposes, teachers and students have enough experience and expertise in their native languages that it is easier to use them during English classes. The article majorly focuses on the use of mother-tongue for teaching English lessons and the role it plays in enhancing mastery of language learning objectives (Krulatz & Iversen, 2020).

For approximately three-quarters of the human race, multilingualism is considered as a usual way of life. Due to the effects of colonialism, the most significant part of Europe has disguised the principle of multilingualism. There is an urgent need to reassert and implement multilingualism as a practical way of life. This is because the modern world considers monolingualism as a handicap that hinders human strength (Knott, 2015). The use of native language for learning English by EFL teachers brings about various advantages and disadvantages according to the learners' experiences of a foreign language. The use of native language helps in the effective mastery of the second language, which results in significant positive on the EFL learners. The mastery of second language learning is hugely based on the learners' knowledge of their respective mother-tongue. Therefore, the implementation of this strategy helps learners to overcome the communication and interaction obstacles that they encounter. Besides, students rely heavily on their background experiences and dominant knowledge of their mother-tongue to improve their mastery of a second language (Campbell, 2016).

Just like the second language, students use structures in their first languag-

es to generate interpretations for vocabulary meanings and forms. These are usually common for reading, writing, and speaking of a second language. The use of the first language in EFL classes has raised many debatable questions among scholars (Wielgosz, 2014). While there are scholars that support the use of the first language among EFL learners on the premises that it saves time spent explaining concepts, others oppose the idea because they consider it as a significant restriction to the amount of exposure that learners achieve in learning their second languages. However, several teachers in the second language acquisition departments have indicated an increasing assurance in the enormous role that the first language plays in enhancing students' ability to acquire second language skills. Consequently, a large number of educators who have guided experience in the acquisition of target second language assert that the use of mother-tongue plays an active and significant role in aiding the instructed second language acquisition (Muhonen, 2015).

According to Krulatz & Iversen, (2020), first language and second language cannot be viewed as different. There is a secure connection between an individual's first language and second language since an individual's ability to learn new concepts is based on their previously acquired language. Therefore, if the first language is excluded from the acquisition process of the second language, adequate comprehension of the target second language will be obstructed. Without comprehension of concepts, it becomes difficult for learners to achieve a substantial level of success in their efforts to learn a new language. Therefore, the use of L1 to aid the process of second language acquisition is significant. Besides, if educators avoid the use of the first language during instructions, they will encounter a highly time-consuming usage of input modification such as repetition, syntax simplification, and synonyms, among others (Morrison, Sacchetto & Croucher, 2019). The use of language input modification also makes the instruction process unrealistic and annoying.

According to research conducted by various scholars, the use of the first language provides students with some sense of security and validity that they are living their real-life experiences by giving them a chance to express themselves (Pogorevici, 2019) freely. With this validity and assurance, learners can readily experiment their English skills. The first language also helps students to develop a basis for the lesson and syllabus negotiation, engage in a discussion of cross-cultural matters, perform an assessment of their comprehension abilities, and explain errors that occur in their second language prompts. According to research conducted with ESL teachers and students on whether or not the first language should be used to aid instruction in the foreign language class, 86% of the teachers and 83% of the students responded with a 'Yes.' Only 14% of the

teachers and 17% of the students voted for a 'No.' From this study, it is evident that both teachers and students appreciate the value of the first language in aiding the acquisition of the second language (Grotelueschen, 2015).

Despite the massive support for the use of mother-tongue to support second language acquisition, there are a proportionate number of scholars that present various arguments on the disadvantages of this second language acquisition strategy. As such, English has been widely considered as the most useful language use during EFL lessons. The use of L1 for second language acquisition causes interference in the learners' native languages. The interference occurs because learners develop an ingrained habit to automatically transfer the L1 surface structures onto another language's surface structure (Ciscel, 2017).

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in the Russian Theoretical Lyceum 1 and Romanian Theoretical Lyceum "Luceafarul" in Vulcaneshti, Gagauzia, Moldova. The study took place between September and December in the 2019-2020 academic year. The study was conducted in two Basic English Skills classes. The study involved the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Leavy, 2017). Questionnaires and observation were the data collection methods used for the study (Turner, Cardinal & Burton, 2017). Before the study, it was contacted and explained to them the importance of their participation in the survey for methodological reasons. It was obtained voluntary consent from the schools and the participants to conduct the research.

The students filled in open-ended questionnaires about their perceptions of the teachers' use of L1 during EFL lessons. Four teachers were observed during English lessons to identify the availability and extent of use of L1 in English classes, the role of L1 in teaching, and the acquisition of a second language. The observations lasted for 45 minutes. Short notes were taken about students' and teachers' use of L1 in class. Students were also issued with observation forms for enhanced data collection. The observation categories were developed in line with previous studies (Mohajan, 2018). The participant students were ages 11-18, which is a minor adjustment of prior studies to fit the context of this study.

3.1 Research Design

The study aims at identifying the relevance of the use of L1 in aiding second language acquisition. The study also views the perspectives on ELF learning in Gagauzia, southern Moldova. If the participants vote for yes, the study will examine the dimension and occasions that L1 is used. The study also analyzes the

students' attitudes toward the use of mother-tongue in an EFL class. The objective of the study is to provide the students with a deeper understanding of why English language learning students are comfortable with the use of their mother tongue during English lessons (Faneca, Araújo e Sá, & Melo-Pfeifer, 2016). Additionally, the study will identify the various attitudes and perceptions of the use of the first language for learning a target second language. This information will enable educators to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons and contexts for students' use of L1. The data will help educators to pay more attention to instructional methods and materials that will accommodate the students' learning needs, which will, in turn, result in potential improvement of the students' language learning skills.

3.2 Population and Sample/Study Group/Participants

The study was conducted in the Russian Theoretical Lyceum 1 and Romanian Theoretical Lyceum "Lucafarul" in Vulcaneshti, Gagauzia, Moldova. The study took place between September and December in the 2019-2020 academic year. A sample of 70 male and female students from different ethnic groups in the beginner, pre-intermediate, and intermediate English level, two Gagauzian, and two Romanian speaking English teachers were contacted to take part in the study.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

The study involved the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Leavy, 2017), mainly descriptive. Questionnaires and observation were the data collection methods used for the study (Turner, Cardinal & Burton, 2017). the analysis of scientific literature; theoretical (systematic analysis, modeling, decomposition); practical (observation, testing, pedagogical experiment).

3.4 Data Collection

The students filled in open-ended questionnaires about their perceptions of the teachers' use of L1 during EFL lessons. Four teachers were observed during English lessons to identify the availability and extent of use of L1 in English classes, the role of L1 in teaching, and the acquisition of a second language. The observations lasted for 45 minutes. Short notes were taken about student's and teachers' use of L1 in class. Students were also issued with observation forms for enhanced data collection.

3.5 Data Analysis

Additionally, the observation data supported the assertion that students

had a negative attitude the English only policy. To analyse the research data collected from both the questionnaires survey and English course case study were analysed by quantitative and qualitative methods.

3.6 Research Ethics

Before the study, it was contacted and explained to them the importance of their participation in the survey for methodological reasons. It was obtained voluntary consent from the schools and the participants to conduct the research.

3.7 Limitation of the Study

Time was a significant factor that limited the scope of the study. Due to limited time, the study only used a relatively small sample population. The use of a large number of participants would help in making a more reliable generalization and different results about the progress of the study. It was also difficult to divide the participants into equal groups based on the language background. The use of a large sample group for the study would have created room for conducting a more quantitative and comparative study. The study also focused only on elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate learners. Therefore, its findings may not be relevant for other groups and levels of language learning students.

4. Result and Discussion

From the study, it is evident that both the students and teachers had positive perceptions of the use of the first language during English lessons. However, the attitude much depended on the teacher's ability to speak the students' first language. In situations where the teachers lacked knowledge of the students' first language, they would use the English only policy to avoid showing disrespect to the students. The students would, therefore, interact among themselves using their mother-tongue. In cases where students unsuccessfully try to express themselves in English, they are allowed to use their first language; then the teacher translates their statement or question to them ease tension and frustration. The use of L1 has its advantages and disadvantages during English lessons, especially for teaching low proficiency level students who come from diverse backgrounds.

As indicated in the research, the use of L1 enables students to aid their second language acquisition process through an explanation of complex vocabularies and sentence structures to the EFL students. The use of L1 also creates a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable and more relaxed to actively take part in the learning process by asking questions and expressing differing opinions. Despite the advantages that L1 offers students, its

application in the learning process should not be overemphasized during English language lessons. This is because it limits students' exposition to target the second language to the classroom experience. According to the students' questionnaire responses and classroom observations, it is clear that the target language should be used as the primary communication method in the process of teaching and learning a second language. In all the observed classes, there was a target language. The teachers affirmed that they only used the students' first language in exceptional cases and if it was essential. A similar result was indicated in the students' questionnaire responses. Although they got an opportunity to use their L1, they were limited to use it for special cases.

Additionally, the teachers had a responsibility to restrict their use of the students' first language. Therefore, they must be very selective of instances and proportions of their usage of the learners' L1, especially in English classes, to avoid interfering with the students' acquisition of their target second language. However, according to the study, most English teachers used the learners' L1 during lessons because the students faced significant challenges in the mastery of English vocabularies and concepts. From this study; it is evident that teachers try to balance and carefully use the students' first language during English lessons to avoid interfering with their second language acquisition process. The use of L1 during English classes is beneficial as it improves the students' comprehension levels.

According to the responses from the questionnaire, students indicated that they had a positive attitude towards the instructors' use of L1 for instruction in EFL classes. 68% of the students responded with a 'Yes' to the question of whether or not educators should use the first language during an English lesson. According to the results, students opted to use their native language in cases where they lacked an understanding of particular vocabularies (Marian, 2017). Before speaking in English or expressing an opinion, they would ask questions and engage in discussions with their colleagues, especially with vocabularies that they could not interpret or understand in the second language. In their responses, the students expressed a great need to use L1 during EFL lessons to help them grow their confidence. The students' also indicated that the educators' use of L1 for instructional purposes made it easier for them to understand English (Norton, 2013).

During lessons, the teachers used the first language to prompt vocabularies in English, explain complex concepts, and to examine their level of comprehension (Hammer, Viesca & Commins, 2019). According to the results of the questionnaire, more than 50% of students affirmed that the use of L1 by their teach-

ers made the learning process easier for them. In the open-ended questions, only a few students indicated that the use of L1 for instructional purposes developed their confidence to ask questions. 53% of the students affirmed that the use of exclusive English for instruction made it difficult for them to understand concepts. 78% of the students indicated that their native language in English classes. According to these results, it is clear that the use of the first language to aid in second language acquisition is significant for the students' learning process. The students also indicated that their teachers use L1 to make fun during lessons, perform a comparison between English and their mother-tongue, and explain complicated terminologies (Kartika-Ningsih & Rose, 2018).

During the classroom observations, it was not that only a few students freely interacted with their teachers in English about classroom content. The observation results indicated a significant difference between the Russian and Romanian teachers' use of L1 for instruction. The difference is due to the teachers' political background. From the time of existence of Moldova, Romanian has been the country's official language and the constitutional language since Moldova's independence (). All the minority ethnic groups have to learn the Romanian language as their first language. As such, the Gagauzain teachers show more competencies in their use of Romanian and Gagauzain for teaching English. For the Romanian teachers, the lack of knowledge in the Gagauzain language hindered them from effectively using it as their L1 in English classes. They, therefore, maintained the English only policy (Ayvazyan & Pym, 2018).

During the observations, the English classes consisted of students from different nationalities. It was noted that the teachers did not use the students' first language from the beginning of the lesson. The teachers implemented the use of strategies such as flashcards, synonyms, pictures, and definitions, among others (Diaconu, 2019). In cases where the students failed to comprehend or understand English vocabularies, the use of L1 by the teachers proved to be useful in simplifying the instruction process. The students' group and peer activities also involved an exhaustive use of L1 while seeking assistance. The students also used L1 to negotiate students failed to understand complex grammar rules, they became unhappy and felt frustrated (Bischof & Tofan, 2018). The observation supports the students' questionnaire responses that indicated their heavy reliance on L1 to only complex vocabularies.

Additionally, the observation data supported the assertion that students had a negative attitude the English only policy. In cases where their teachers engaged in the exclusive use of English for instruction, the students complained that the terminologies were too complicated for them to understand (Sun, 2017). There-

fore, for students who had esteem issues, to simplify complex grammar rules, and to effectively provide learning instructions, the teachers needed to use L1 in the various English lessons. In a diverse classroom, teachers were forced to use the students' first language, a situation that resulted in the existence of three different languages within one class. Therefore, the productive use of the English language faced a significant challenge. However, it was noted that some students became lazy in their use of the English language as they overly depended on their first language to learn concepts (Macías, 2018).

Contrary to this observation, for the majority of the students, the use of L1 for classroom instruction seemed to be less stressful and frustrating. Therefore, they were motivated to actively take part in class discussions by asking questions using their first language (Diaconu, 2017). To improve students' understanding, the teachers applied different instructional techniques to make it easier for students to understand complex vocabularies. For instance, the teachers would write sentences on the board and ask the students to take part in translating the sentence collectively. The teachers also asked the students general learning questions to activate their background information and enhance their comprehension. The use of flashcards, synonyms, pictures, and definitions was also incorporated in the learning process when introducing new vocabularies and describing new words (Diaconu, 2017).

5. Recommendations

Due to the limited scope of the study, another research should be carried out that involves the intermediate and advanced language skills level students. Future research should also use a larger sample of participants who are students. The data collection process for the observed should also include video recording for better analysis.

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