Monolingual versus Multilingual Classroom Practices in English for Academic Purposes: Learning Outcomes, Student Attitudes, and Instructor Observations

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The critical importance of L2 input, output and interaction in language teaching and learning notwithstanding, the decision between immersive (monolingual, target-language only) versus non-immersive (multilingual, code-switching) approaches has been considered "probably the most fundamental question facing second language acquisition (SLA) researchers, language teachers, and policymakers" (Macaro, 2014:10). This intervention-based study examined both approaches – monolingual versus multilingual – from the perspectives of learning outcomes, learner preferences, and instructor views.

Two teacher-researchers and English language learners (n>50) in four English for Academic Purposes courses at a CEFR-B2 level of proficiency participated in a longitudinal, 4-month study. The teacher-researchers contrasted the standard, monolingual, target language-only pedagogy with a non-immersive, multilingual pedagogy, where students were encouraged to use their full linguistic repertoire (target, native, or other languages) for in-class discussion, project preparation, and pre-writing activities. All students experienced both pedagogical approaches in counter-balanced fashion. Analyses included (1) quantitative analyses of assignment scores (paragraph and genre writing and presentational speaking), (2) qualitative analyses of student preferences for approach, and (3) qualitative analyses of comparative teacher-researcher views of the pedagogical implementation.

Quantitative analyses of assignment scores showed no statistically significant differences between multilingual and monolingual conditions throughout the study. Qualitative analyses of student preferences revealed somewhat mixed views, but generally positive attitudes towards multilingual classroom language practices. Qualitative analyses of teacher-researcher observations revealed parallel themes between both instructors and generally supported fidelity-to-condition in classroom language use, with evaluative comments in some cases favoring the multilingual condition. These results are in line with additional research using a comparable methodology in eight other classrooms across languages and proficiency levels (French and Arabic at pre-CEFR-A1 levels - Brown; 2021; and English at CEFR-B1 versus C1 levels - Brown & Lally, 2019). Taken together, these studies suggest either no differences or facilitative effects of a multilingual approach across languages, across proficiency levels, across instructors, and across and within student groups. Findings are discussed in relation to "target-language-only" policies implemented in some language education contexts, translanguaging (e.g. García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014) and codeswitching pedagogies, especially beyond vocabulary teaching (e.g. Tian & Macaro, 2012; Zhao & Macaro, 2016), and the construct of 'multicompetence' (Cook, 1992; Cook & Wei, 2016).

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