



# The Use of Mother Tongue in English Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The use of mother tongue in teaching a foreign language is a controversial topic. While some researchers claim that the mother tongue should not be used in foreign language classrooms, others think that it makes a valuable contribution to the learning process. In different methods and approaches, the role of mother tongue is different. This article is aimed at promoting and enhancing the use of English language in EFL classes and at the same time allowing the mother tongue to be used in particular situations.

**Keywords:**

Mother tongue, First language (L1), Target language

## Introduction

Language learning is a continuous process. That’s why a focus should be given to the learners’ level, age and background and the teachers’ perceptions to teach the language. If the teacher insists on using only the target language in EFL classrooms and ignoring learners’ background, learners may feel forced to use the language and may resent learning. Moreover it slows down the pace of the learners who are willing to learn and use the language. The role of mother tongue has always been an important issue in the study of Foreign Language Teaching.

It is a fact that teachers may use the mother tongue in various situation for different purposes. However, the use of L1 should not be exaggerated because the more the students are exposed to the target language, the better they will learn it. In fact, the use of mother tongue may contribute to language learning process in various occasions in the learning-teaching process; however, the exercise use of it may result in too much dependence on it, which less desired outcome. And also it is important for

teachers to understand the errors their students make and to target their lessons to each student’s individual needs.

## Main Part

Mother tongue can often be referred to as your first language or native language. It is the language that you most commonly speak. Mother tongue in education refers to when a school or educational institution integrates the language a child is most familiar with (their mother tongue) into the classroom lesson along with the school’s lesson (such as English). This is normally the language that the child speaks at home with their family. Today’s trend and scientific research reveal the fact that the use of the target language (L2) is essential in EFL classrooms. However, the appropriate use of mother tongue (L1) plays a significant role in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language as well. At some levels and applications the role of learners first language in the classroom can be seen facilitating. There are several possible occasions for the usage of the mother tongue which might be beneficial and

time-saving in the whole process of true understanding the grammar structures and rules of the foreign language. The mother tongue can be used to provide a quick and accurate translation of an English word that might take several minutes for the teacher to explain and, even then, there would be no guarantee that the explanation had been understood correctly. It can also be used to clarify a difficult language pattern by providing with the equivalent in L1. There are some cases in which the use of students' mother tongue is allowed in EFL classes.

Teachers can use students' mother tongue when:

- Translating abstract words like "beauty" or "love"
- Checking that students knew the meaning of a word after presenting it.
- Explaining a difficult grammar point so that students can understand how it is expressed using both the English language and students' mother tongue language.

The similar amount of students stated that using the mother tongue facilitates their process of learning English. There are also very interesting findings in replies of the teachers joined the research study. (Schweers 1999) They conveyed the following reasons for using the mother tongue during their classes:

- To help the students to understand the whole concept
- To improve their report writing
- To create the mutual understanding between the teacher and the students
- To show the students the respect and importance of their native language

The term 'mother tongue', 'first language' and 'native language/tongue' are essentially all the same though there are some instances when they mean different things. 'First Language, mother tongue and native tongue are common terms for the language which a person acquires first in his childhood because it is spoken in the family and/or it is the language of the country where he is living. Therefore, the language that one first learns to speak when he or she is a child can be said the first language. Teachers would be required to be aware of when, how

and why to use L1, that is to say, the proper use of L1 who denied that word-for-word and sentence-for-sentence translation. Many studies show that limited use of mother tongue is beneficial and over use of it may counter-productive as it encourages the low exposure in target language. L1 is most useful at beginning and low levels. If students have little or no knowledge of the target language, L1 can be used to introduce the major differences between L1 and L2, and the main grammatical characteristics of L2 that they should be aware of. Mother tongue is the in-born language, which a baby has already familiarized even in the gestation of mother before it was born. The first language is the language which a child acquires either through schooling or socialization, such as family. The target language is the language learners are studying, and also the individual items of language that they want to learn, or the teacher wants them to learn. The target language is the language being translated into. For example, I work from Uzbek to English, so my source language is Uzbek and my target language is English. A classroom situation in which the target language is used for communication between the teacher and the learner, and the between the learners and their peers, gives the learner opportunities for interaction in the target language.

### Conclusion

The role of mother tongue has always been an important issue in the study of foreign language teaching. The study suggests that through meaningful oral practice in English, using shorter and simpler expressions, short chatting in English with students, of course, may enhance target language use. The role of mother tongue should be restricted to be facilitative, supportive and compensatory in foreign language classrooms. Both too much dependency and total prohibition of the mother tongue should be avoided. Most importantly, teacher should keep speaking English maximize the exposure of students in English language.

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