

Middle school teachers' views and recommendations about using translation exercises in L2 reading comprehension classes

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ABSTRACT: Reintroducing translation exercises in EFL classes has been advocated by theorists and scholars in the field. They highlighted the facilitative role of translation and called for paying attention to its position in FL teaching, especially with regard to the four skills (Atkinson, 1993, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Deller & Riuvolucrí, 2002). However, it is noted that little attention has been paid to suggesting practical pedagogical and methodological recommendations of a possible use of translation exercises in EFL teaching. In the present paper, we aim at exploring teachers' views and recommendations towards using translation exercises in the teaching of reading comprehension to beginners in Moroccan middle schools. To do this, the study employed a qualitative method of research. Despite Covid-19 discouraging conditions and the difficulty of finding teachers who have been teaching English in middle schools continuously, ten teachers who use the same textbook with the same level of learners were interviewed. Analysis revealed that the interviewees are positive about using translation in beginners' reading comprehension classes on condition that the activities are short and well-controlled, should come in the initial and the final stages of the lesson, particularly with culture-based reading material.

Keywords: translation exercises, recommendations, reading comprehension, beginners, middle school teacher

Opiniones y recomendaciones de los profesores de secundaria sobre el uso de ejercicios de traducción en las clases de comprensión lectora de L2

RESUMEN: Los académicos en el campo han defendido la reintroducción de ejercicios de traducción en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera. Destacaron el papel de la traducción y pidieron que se prestara atención a su posición en la enseñanza de la LE, especialmente en lo que respecta a las cuatro habilidades (Atkinson, 1993, 1987; Auerbach, 1993, Deller & Riuvolucrí, 2002). Sin embargo, se observa que se ha prestado poca atención a sugerir recomendaciones metodológicas prácticas para un posible uso de ejercicios de traducción. En el presente artículo, nuestro objetivo es explorar las opiniones y recomendaciones de los profesores sobre el uso de ejercicios de traducción en la enseñanza de la comprensión lectora a principiantes en las escuelas intermedias marroquíes. El estudio empleó un método de investigación cualitativo. A pesar de las condiciones desalentadoras de la Covid-19 y de la dificultad de encontrar profesores que hayan enseñado inglés continuamente en las escuelas secundarias, se entrevistó a diez profesores marroquíes que utilizan el mismo libro de texto y con el mismo nivel de alumnos. El análisis de los datos reveló que los profesores son po-

sitivos acerca del uso de la traducción en las clases de comprensión lectora, siempre que las actividades sean breves y estén bien controladas, y se realicen en las etapas inicial y final de la lección, particularmente con material de lectura basado en la cultura.

Palabras clave: ejercicios de traducción, recomendaciones pedagógicas, comprensión lectora, principiantes, docentes de secundaria

1. INTRODUCTION

For many years, the grammar translation method valued the use of learners' L1 as a teaching tool (Larson-Freeman, 2000). However, the coming of the monolingual methods has marginalized the inclusion of translation. Subsequently, it was totally rejected in FL classes (Hawks, 2001; Packet, 2003; PennyCook, 1994; Wringe, 1989). This stance of refusal, which strongly appeared in the 1970's and 1980's, was due to considering translation as a source of laziness in addition to seeing it as a classroom practice which decreases students' exposure to L2 (Kavaliauskienė & Kaminskienė, 2007), especially when used injudiciously (Pavón & Ramos, 2019).

Criticism against the incorporation of L1 in the FLT classroom focused mainly on students' unwished dependency on their mother tongue while learning a foreign language. Swift (2006) argues that learners in FL classes will develop a strong sense of dependency stressing the fact that they will not be able to build L2 understanding from teachers' explanations or the context. In the same way, Ross (2000) believes that rejecting L1 is primarily based on obliging students to share their L2 time with their L1 considering it unfair in the sense that learners will miss the chances of getting exposed to L2. More reasons standing behind rejecting the use of L1 came with the monolingual methods. In this respect, Malmkjaer (1998, p. 6) lists various reasons why L1 should be avoided in FL classrooms including the fact that translation:

- is independent from the four skills.
- takes up valuable time.
- is unnatural.
- prevents students from thinking in L2.
- is a bad test of language skills.
- produces interference.
- is only appropriate for translators.

Duff (1994) gives further justifications which stand behind opposing the use of L1 in foreign language teaching. In this sense, he claims that translating may not be of great benefit for learners because it is a text-bound task which only targets reading and writing. The same scholar criticises translation for not being communicative and that it does not involve oral interaction along with being a boring activity on the grounds that it does not motivate students in class (Duff, 1994). Additionally, Muranoi (2000) criticizes translation for being an inappropriate exercise in the initial stages of foreign language teaching.

In contrast, the last two decades have witnessed an increasing change in the way translation use in FLT is perceived. In this regard, Atkinson (1987) insists that L1 should have a valued position in a "post-communicative approach" (p. 241). Other researchers in the field of FLT called for the reconsideration of L1 stressing the fact that it can play a facilitative role (Duff, 1994; Leonardi, 2011). In reaction to the idea of refusal, other prominent scholars

criticized the stance of banning L1 in foreign language classes. They, instead, advocated the inclusion of translation in EFL classes considering it as a legitimate pedagogical teaching tool (Ellis, 1992; Harmer, 1991; Ur, 1996).

Prohibiting the incorporation of translation in FL contexts was considered impractical because depriving students from using their L1 to think and link it with their L2 existing knowledge has been regarded impossible. "L1 is present in L2 learners' minds whether teachers want it to be there or not. The L2 knowledge is being created in them is connected in all sorts of ways with their L1 knowledge" (Cook, 2007, p. 584). Year after year, calling for reintroducing translation in EFL classes was foregrounded. Findings of research indicated that translation is likely to play a role in facilitating foreign language teaching and learning (Ellis, 2005; Eskildsen, 2008; Han, 2005; Mouhana, 2010; Poole, 2005). In light of this, the present paper aims at investigating teachers' views and their methodological recommendations on the reintroduction of translation exercises in reading comprehension classes supposing that including students' L1 can be perceived positively but conditionally by teachers of English in middle schools.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The use of translation exercises in the EFL classroom has been supported by scholars who argue that L1 can be facilitative in FLT (Beeby, 1996; Cook, 2010; Duff, 1994; Liao, 2006). Translation use has been encouraged for it is believed to constitute a solid basis for learners in building comprehension and production in the target language (Chamot et. al, 1987). Also, students' mother tongue use in FL classrooms has been the core of reconsideration based on the idea that L1 can have positive psychological effects on learners. Husain (1996) and Couto-Cantero et al., (2021), the latter from the domain of using audiovisual translation to teach English, both argue that the use of translation-related exercises in FL classroom is likely to increase learners' level of motivation and self-confidence along with giving them a positive feeling of relaxation. In the same context, making use of translation is believed to help provide a motivating atmosphere of learning where students' anxiety is lessened (Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2015). Brooks-Lewis (2009) sees that the use of L1 can reduce students' feelings of anxiety which result from dealing with foreign language material.

On the one hand, the initiative of including translation in FL practices has been welcomed because translation is seen as a reasonable pedagogical tool (Bowen, 1994; Ellis, 1992; Pintado Gutiérrez, 2012; Harmer, 1991; Ur, 1996; Widdowson, 1978). On the other hand, it is noted that a small number of studies have focused on providing practical ideas according to which L1 can be reused anew and away from the framework dictated by the GTM (Duff, 1989; Eadie, 1999; Edge, 1986; Nastroga, 1988; Ulrych, 1986; Urgese, 1989). From a methodological perspective, common pedagogical guidelines, in this regard, offer general didactic views about the topic. Cook (2001) argues that "translation as a teaching technique is a different matter from translation as a goal of translation teaching" (p. 200). Similarly, Klaudy (2003) and Pintado Gutiérrez (2012) argue that for translation to be included effectively in foreign language classes, it should be treated as a pedagogical tool. That is, students should not be trained to translate but to use translation in learning practices. Borghetti (2011) and Cook (2001) contend that translation can be very beneficial to foreign

language teaching when properly implemented considering it as a rich source as long as it is used judiciously and idealistically as also claimed by Pavón and Ramos (2019).

More specifically, translation has been recommended in the teaching of vocabulary and the three basic skills, reading, writing and speaking (Liao, 2006). Additionally, translation exercises have been suggested to be incorporated alongside other traditional L2 teaching tasks depending on the characteristics of the learners (Stern, 1992). Further, the inclusion of translation exercises has been regarded useful to improve the teaching and learning processes along with bringing innovation to the teaching methods in the context of foreign language teaching (Cook, 2001). Furthermore, translation activities are regarded beneficial to help students develop cultural awareness and improve their intercultural education (Borghetti, 2011; Lertola, 2018) and to promote autonomous learning (Pintado Gutiérrez, 2012).

The above-mentioned new perspective of reconsidering translation as a source of help regards the use of translation exercises in the teaching of reading as beneficial. Translation exercises were recommended to facilitate the teaching of the basic skills, especially reading because comprehension in L2 is likely to be challenging for beginners (Swift, 2006). Encountering L2 input for the first time in reading comprehension classes, learners are expected to find difficulties in comprehension. In such classes, translation is believed to improve comprehension since it encourages the students to read a text carefully at different levels (Vans Els et al., 1984). Translation, in this sense, is also believed to draw students' attention to the entire text by focusing on the word, sentence and text levels.

Recommending translation activities for reading comprehension classes, Topolska-Pado (2011) and Swift (2006) argue that such exercises can be included in the initial phases of the lessons. That is, in the pre-reading stage. Similarly, Dagilienė (2012) suggests that L1-related exercises are expected to benefit students when invested in the introductory phase of the reading class. Also, Popovic (2012) is in favour of using translation exercises stressing that preparatory translation activities can be integrated in reading comprehension. Duff (1989) claims that translation exercises in the post-reading stage are expected to be suitable. He believes that L1 exercises can invite speculation and encourage discussions in class between teachers and students (Duff, 1989).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Objectives

The general purpose of this study is to examine teachers' views about using translation in teaching English to beginners and investigate the level of their agreement towards avoiding translation in EFL classes. Specifically, it aims at eliciting practical methodological recommendations of a possible incorporation of translation exercises in L2 reading comprehension classes endorsing the idea that middle school teachers of English in Morocco may be in favour of using translation-related exercises in L2 reading classes through providing methodological insights about L1 use despite the fact that they are officially urged not to resort to L1 in their classroom practices. For the attainment of these objectives, the following specific research questions have been postulated:

1. What are middle school English teachers' views about using translation exercises in reading comprehension classes of beginners?
2. How should translation exercises be included in reading comprehension classes of beginners?

3.2. Context and participants

In Moroccan middle schools, translation/L1 use is totally banned in EFL classrooms. Teachers are strongly urged to solely use L2. In contrast, they could be positive about using translation exercises, especially in reading comprehension classes. Hence, a reintroduction of students' L1 in the teaching of reading comprehension to beginners might be welcomed. Also, they might have their own methodological and pedagogical perceptions on how to incorporate L1-related exercises in EFL classes. Accordingly, the main purpose of this paper is to discover middle school teachers' views and recommendations towards using translation in the teaching of reading comprehension to beginners.

For carrying out the present study, 10 male and female teachers of English, who met the profile of the intended population, were invited to take part. Accordingly, the 10 teachers, who were selected, have been working continuously in middle schools where English classes are given to zero beginners. Additionally, all the teachers (Henceforth T) use the same textbook. Six out of the ten interviewees have been teaching English for 10 years. The remaining four interviewees have taught English in middle schools for about 20 years so far. Seven out of the ten interviewees hold BA degrees while the others obtained MA degrees in English studies. Prior to the interviewing process, contact was made with the teachers who showed readiness to be interviewed, but it was not possible to meet with the interviewees due to the Covid-19 pandemic circumstances. Luckily, with the schools being partially reopened in Morocco it was feasible to interview each teacher in person.

3.3. Data-gathering instruments

To collect the necessary data which can lead to the attainment of the objectives of this study and pave the way for answering the research questions postulated, qualitative semi-structured interviews were adopted. The selection of this type of interviews stemmed from the fact that such a data collection instrument enables researchers to elicit specific answers to focused questions and provide reliable comparable qualitative data given that they are carried out following a question guide (Kabir, 2016).

What makes semi-structured interviews appropriate for this study is that they allow the deployment of open-ended questions which help discover more about the topic under study because "the semi-structured interview allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 83). Following an interview guide, teachers were invited to answer questions which target discovering their views on the use of translation activities in the teaching of reading comprehension in addition to getting their pedagogical recommendations on how such a teaching strategy can be incorporated. The ten interviews were 9 to 12 minutes long and were all audio-recorded for further research processes.

For data analysis, thematic analysis method was applied. For this purpose, the ten interviews were transcribed then re-readings of the transcripts were done to generate subthemes. Following this analytical step, final themes were obtained after a process of revision.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Teachers' views

With specific reference to the first research question, *what are middle school English teachers' views about using translation exercises in reading comprehension classes of beginners?* thematic analysis resulted in three hierarchical themes. Translation exercises were regarded as a *welcomed teaching strategy*, a *recommended reading comprehension technique* and a *source of facilitation*.

4.1.1. Welcomed strategy

Perceiving translation exercises as a *welcomed strategy* was the first theme derived from the interviewees' responses. Most of the respondents welcomed the idea of integrating translation exercises in the teaching of reading comprehension to beginners. In this respect, T1 said that "it [use of translation] would be a new method in teaching English via using translation. That would be great I think". The same interviewee added that "students will like the idea of using translation" (T1). In the same line, T6 believed that students will react positively which makes translation exercises welcomed. "They will feel good. They will like that I think because we just don't encourage it" (T6). Considering translation exercises as an appreciated teaching strategy in reading comprehension classes was also highlighted by other interviewees. T7 saw that "they [students] will be happy. They will be fine if it is integrated in [reading] comprehension task". Another interviewee praised the idea of including translation exercises claiming that "it will be great, great I think" (T9). In total harmony with T9, the suggestion of including translation was acclaimed by T1 who argued that "it [use of translation] would be a great idea".

4.1.2. Recommended reading technique

Analysis of interviewees' responses led to a second theme according to which translation exercises were regarded as a *recommended reading comprehension technique*. Interviewees made it clear in their answers that translation can have an important room in teaching reading comprehension to beginners. T1 stated, in this sense, that "this is a new thinking of using translation to teach reading comprehension. It would be good for students". T3 also recommended translation as a comprehension technique for beginners. This interviewee stressed the idea that "this [use of translation exercises] will make the lesson or the task in general easy for them because it is their first time learning English or learning a language so they need translation of course" (T3). Among the interviewees who recommended translation as a teaching technique in reading comprehension classes was T2. The latter argued that:

...beginners who haven't been exposed to English before it's hard for them to understand the text in an effective way so in the pre reading stage we always try to clarify or pre teach the main or key vocabulary that would block understanding so among the strategies that we use is translation, ok, so that we can help students read the text effectively (T2).

Recommending translation exercises in reading comprehension classes was expressed in plain words by further interviewees. T7 contended that there is nothing non-pedagogical when translation is used in reading comprehension classes. "There is no harm to use it [translation], why not?" (T7). More emphasis on recommending translation came with (T8). The latter interviewee saw that "we should think of including translation exercises as production of reading" (T8).

4.1.3. *Source of facilitation*

Analysis of responses resulted in a third theme in light of which translation exercises were seen as a source of facilitation. T10 claimed that translation exercises can play a facilitative role in reading comprehension classes. The latter argued that "sometimes you explain just one question in Arabic and they [students] understand what is going on. Sometimes one word can hinder them from understanding the whole text" (T10). In a similar way of seeing things, T4 maintained that translation exercises can really help facilitate tasks for students. This interviewee insisted that "for translation it can facilitate by bridging the gap between the target language and the native language so sometimes they [students] have difficulties understanding the language not understanding the task" (T4). Seeing it eye to eye with T4, T2 praised the use of translation exercises in reading classes. The same interviewee saw that "translation activities can foster students' understanding of the text, especially when talking about the key words which can hinder students' understanding" (T2). In the same line, T3 argued that "this [translation exercises use] will make it easy and will make or help them [students] understand the lesson and the task". It was also stressed that "translation exercises will be more useful so that the students will understand" (T3).

4.2. Teachers' recommendations

In the light of thematic analysis conducted and regarding the second research question, three major themes were obtained for the sake of discovering how translation activities should be included in reading comprehension classes. The three themes translate interviewees' recommendations of use in case translation exercises are opted for in reading comprehension classes.

4.2.1. *A pre and post-reading strategy*

All respondents, without any exception, highlighted the idea that translation exercises should better be included in reading comprehension classes during the pre and post-reading stages of the lesson. In this context, T2 strongly argued that:

...in the pre-reading stage, we always try to clarify or pre-teach the main or the key vocabulary that would block understanding so among the strategies that we use is translation [...] so that we can help students read the text effectively (T2).

The same interviewee added that translation exercises should be included “in the pre-reading stage [...] it’s the main stage I think where translation should be used so that students can understand the text better” (T2). In the same vein, T3 supported the suggestion that translation exercises are to be incorporated preferably in the pre-reading stage. “I think in the pre-reading stage. It’s gonna be more useful in the pre-reading stage. Translation exercises will be more useful so that students will understand the lesson easily” (T3). Putting more emphasis on this point, T10 went in line with the previous interviewees. This latter stated:

...for me it’s pre-reading because that’s the beginning. If you just talk in English and start to try to explain everything in English and wait until the post reading stage and try to make it in Arabic it’s too late. I think it’s better to use it [...] in the pre-reading. I mean at first (T10).

In the same context, further interviewees underlined that translation exercises can be made part of the reading comprehension lesson through including them in both the pre and post-reading stages. In this regard, T1 claimed that translation exercises can be a good option stating that “it [translation] could be good for pre-reading tasks and it could also be used in the post-reading tasks” (T1). The same claim was made by other interviewees. According to T5 “translation exercises should be in the last stage [...] because it requires rich vocabulary”. In harmony with the latter, T9 insisted that translation should be implemented as “a post-reading when you finish everything” (T9).

4.2.2. Well-controlled short exercise

The second theme as regards how translation exercises should be included in reading comprehension classes was labelled *well-controlled short exercise*. The incorporation of translation exercises was conditionally referred to, by interviewees, as an activity which should not take much of the teaching time along with being well-controlled when used in reading comprehension classes. In this sense, T1 claimed that “it [translation] should be used within a limit. I mean it should not be used more [often], but it should be used in a logical and a more rational way for students”. Going in line with the latter claim, (T3) strongly emphasized the idea of having much control on the use of translation exercises along with making translation practice short in terms of time stating that “the extent should not be free. It should be controlled [...] to give them a specific time and not let it like that [...]. This should be controlled” (T3). Not very differently, T8 focused on the time to be allotted to translation exercises arguing that the activities should be very small. Similarly, T9 perceived the idea similarly. The latter interviewee insisted on the fact that only “one or two exercises, which focus on some words from the text not the whole text, should be given” (T9).

4.3.3. Culture-based text necessity

For the sake of further discovery of teachers’ views on recommended use of translation exercises in reading comprehension classes of beginners, a third theme was generated.

Translation exercises, in this regard, were deemed as a *necessity for culture-based texts*. In relation with this theme, interviewees stressed the cultural differences between L1 and L2 in terms of proverbs, sayings and idiomatic expressions. Accordingly, T4 claimed that translation exercises can be very beneficial in reading comprehension classes stating that “sometimes we have some proverbs or sayings at the pre-reading stage and they [students] don’t know exactly the meaning so they can use translation as a cognitive strategy to understand the general context of the reading text” (T4). The same interviewee added that using translation exercises with culture-based reading texts “can be beneficial to enrich their [students’] idiomatic repertoire of the target language” (T4). Hand in hand with the latter interviewee, T5 underlined the importance of incorporating translation exercises in dealing with culture-based reading comprehension texts. This interviewee saw that “if you are dealing with a text tackling for example [the] cultural heritage of a country and you are to focus on a specific [...] cultural aspect I think it [translation] is gonna be a golden opportunity” (T5).

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Middle school teachers' views

As one of the basic language skills, reading is regarded as the most stable and durable language skill (Rivers, 1981). In addition, it remains one of the skills needed for learning a foreign language because it is believed to be a rich source for linguistic knowledge for FL learners (Robinson, 1991). However, the teaching of reading comprehension is likely to cause some challenge for learners because they could face difficulties while reading L2 material to which they are new given that they may lack the necessary vocabulary to comprehend the reading material. Discovering teachers' perception about using translation exercises in reading comprehension classes was one of the specific objectives of the present study. For this purpose, a section of the semi-structured interview was devoted. Analysis of teachers' answers regarding this point resulted in obtaining three themes according to which translation exercises were considered as *a welcomed teaching strategy, a recommended reading comprehension technique and a source of facilitation*.

Taking into account the results above, it is inferred that middle school teachers of English have a positive stance towards including translation exercises in the teaching of reading comprehension to beginners. Such a standpoint can be generally supported by Talaván and Avila-Cabrera (2015) who argue that translation-based activities can be motivating along with Couto-Cantero et al., (2021) who consider that this type of teaching activities can help increase students' interest in FL learning. More specifically, teachers' positive view finds support in previous studies wherein translation exercises were suggested as a strategy which can promote the teaching of reading comprehension (Upton, 1997). Recommending translation as a comprehension strategy by interviewees is in line with García and Otheguy (2016) and Upton (1997) who claim that reading in L2 is not monolingual but an event during which L2 learners have unconscious access to L1. Welcoming the use of translation exercises, as a preferred strategy by interviewees, springs from the idea that such exercises could naturally optimize the learning process (Ambele, 2022) provided that translating is a

skill which learners uncontrollably use. In this sense, Upton (1997) contends that L2 learners normally resort to translation as a strategy to understand the reading material.

More support for teachers' point of view towards the incorporation of translation exercises in reading comprehension classes can be found in Kern (1994) research findings. The latter conducted a study on translation exercises as a strategy in L2 reading. The researcher concluded that translation is often used by students to comprehend texts in L2. Kern's conclusion backs up teachers' welcoming stance given that learners use mental translation when they face difficulty in understanding unfamiliar words, expressions or structures (Kern, 1994). Likewise, Leonardi (2009) asserts that translation activities may provide a guided practice in reading comprehension skill for learners. Also, she sees that translation can be a valuable teaching aid to integrate the four traditional skills (Leonardi, 2009). In harmony with the interviewees' viewpoint, Leonardi (2011) argues that the inclusion of translation exercises is evidently beneficial to learners. She asserts that one of the obvious advantages of incorporating translation as a teaching strategy can be the improvement of students' perception of reading comprehension (Leonardi, 2011).

The above-mentioned conclusions, along with the claims presented in the previous research findings show that the use of translation exercises in reading comprehension of beginners is regarded by middle school teachers as a welcomed teaching strategy which they endorse. Translation exercises are deemed beneficial for their facilitative role in comprehension tasks. Meanwhile, the incorporation of translation exercises in EFL contexts in general entails a methodological framework which can make it pedagogically suitable and beneficial for teaching and learning.

5.2. Middle school teachers' recommendations

Addressing the second research question, the present study tried to elicit pedagogical recommendations from teachers of English in middle schools on the use of translation exercises in L2 reading. The analysis of teachers' responses resulted in three main themes. Translation exercises were recommended to be used as *pre and post-reading teaching strategy*, *well-controlled short exercise* along with being strongly recommended for *culture-based reading material*.

Analysis of interviewees' responses indicates that translation exercises are preferably recommended in *the pre and post-reading stages* of the lesson. This pedagogical suggestion is in line with Topolska-Pado (2011) and Swift (2006) who argue that translation-related exercises can be included in the initial phases of the lessons. They stress that translation is recommended for many teaching purposes, especially during the initial stages of comprehension classes (Swift, 2006; Topolska-Pado, 2011). This is generally supported by Ambele and Watson Todd (2021) who claim that there should be a methodological recognition of L1 in FL teaching methodology. In accordance with this, Dagilienė (2012) sees that translation exercises can be suitable for the introductory phase of the lesson as an activity which can prepare the students for the coming tasks contending that translation can be used as a warm up activity because it serves the material which students will be working on later (Dagilienė, 2012). Backing up the finding of using translation exercises in pre and post-reading stages of reading, Duff (1989) argues that translation can be proposed as an activity for production

stage in reading comprehension classes. In this sense, he claims that including translation exercises in the post-reading stage can invite speculation and encourage discussion (Duff, 1989).

More perceptions on a possible methodological incorporation of translation in reading comprehension classes led us to discover that interviewees recommend translation tasks to be *well-controlled and short*. It is understood that translation exercises should not dominate the classes in addition to the fact that they should be well-planned and used along with other traditional reading tasks. Interviewees' recommendations, in this very specific sense, find support in Duff's (1989) claims. He asserts that to enhance the teaching of the four skills, translation activities can be employed as long as they are properly designed. This said, the insertion of translation activities should be taken seriously and carefully while designing lessons, an idea which is in line with Pavón and Ramos (2019) who recommend careful inclusion of L1 to guarantee exposure to L2 as well as Pintado Gutiérrez (2012) who endorses an appropriate systematic use of translation. In harmony with these, Popovic (2001) insists on the fact that preparatory translation activities can be integrated in reading comprehension on condition that they are carefully graded; however, longer pieces of translation should be done at home. That is, much attention should be paid, on the part of teachers, to the students' level to include activities which suit their level and save the classroom time by assigning longer translation activities as homework.

Another source of back up for the idea that translation exercises should be short and necessarily combined with other tasks is clearly found in Nation's (2003) assertions about incorporating translation exercises in foreign language teaching. This researcher calls for a balanced approach wherein translation should have a position. That is, mixing translation exercises with other tasks which are traditionally used in FL classrooms (Nation, 2003). In the same regard, Turnbull (2001) advocates a simultaneous application of L1 and L2 where translation exercises will not dominate the lesson and be well-controlled as suggested by the interviewees. Accordingly, the latter researcher views admixing L1 and L2 as a pedagogical combination in which L1 is a supportive and complementary tool to maximize L2 use (Turnbull, 2001). Hand in hand with Turnbull's contention and interviewees' viewpoint, Stern (1992) recommends that using translation exercises alongside L2 has a facilitative nature in the teaching of a foreign language. Further support for this particular recommendation is clearly stated by Popovic who argues that translation activities need not be pursued in isolation, but should rather be included in existing courses (Popovic, 2001). In total consistency with the latter claim, Mahmoud (2006) states that "in reading comprehension, translation should be one part of a teacher's methodological repertoire. For reading comprehension [...] translation should be combined with multiple choice, true/false, short answers and other test techniques" (p. 33).

A further recommendation obtained from the interviewees' responses introduced translation exercises as a necessity for *culture-based reading* material. Such type of reading texts is believed to cause foreign language learners, at all level and beginners in specific, difficulties in comprehension (Florez, 2000). Stating this, resorting to translation exercises remains a strategy which can be a source of benefit for cultural and intercultural education (Lertola, 2018). With reference to previous studies, Halliday (1994) highlights the importance of L1 use in classroom purposes in which translation can serve the interpersonal function of allow-

ing the discussion of the cultural values and identities given that these aspects are specific to languages and can constitute a real obstacle for pre-intermediate learners. In this very particular sense, Florez (2000) argues that translation has the potential of giving a feeling of security (Balabakgil & Mede, 2016) and containing the fear and frustration which FL learners may experience with a new language and culture in addition to promoting learners' cultural and intercultural awareness (Borghetti, 2011). More support for the interviewees' recommendation of using translation with culture-related reading texts is provided by Cook (2001). The scholar stresses that translation exercises are likely to be used for a better understanding of cultural aspects of L2. He sees that L1 use may be employed in some cases to understand what social and cultural conventions which L2 expressions display (Cook, 2001).

6. CONCLUSION

The present paper emphasizes teachers' perceptions as an essential part in the teaching and learning processes. Investigating their views was significant to discover teachers' opinions and recommendations about using translation exercises in reading comprehension classes of beginners. The results revealed that although English teachers in middle schools in Morocco are officially supposed to avoid L1, they welcome the idea of incorporating L2 exercises in teaching reading comprehension to beginners. Also, it was revealed that teachers agree on the inclusion of learners' L1 in the form of translation exercises as long as these exercises are well-controlled and short. In addition, it was found that translation exercises should preferably be used in the pre and post-reading stages of the reading lesson, especially with culture-based reading texts. From a very specific research angle, the present study placed focus on investigating teachers in middle school through interviewing 10 teachers who met the wished profile and were available due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the case with any study, the present study has some limitations to be mentioned. The major limitation is mainly related to the participants and context. From a practical perspective, this study tried to shed light on incorporating L1 in EFL classrooms with exclusive focus on the reading comprehension skill with beginners. A shortage of studies in this regard was noted. This, interestingly, refers us to the necessity of carrying out more future studies which focus on the practical inclusion of translation exercises in FL classrooms as regards the teaching of other language components and other types of learners including pre-intermediate, advanced and proficient learners.

7. REFERENCES

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