Impact of Using Parallel Text Strategy on Teaching Reading to Intermediate II Level Students

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Article Info	Abstract
	The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of parallel reading text (English and Arabic) on English as a Foreign language (EFL) Intermediate II level students' at Birzeit University in terms of reading comprehension, vocabulary retention, and sentence structure awareness. The sample for this study is 38 undergraduate students of the aforementioned level in two class sections during the fall semester of 2019-2020. One reading text from the course textbook was selected for this experimental study. The controlled group was instructed with an English only reading text while the experimental group used a parallel text of the same reading passage. A pretest on the reading text was used as an instrument to measure the reading skills of vocabulary, reading comprehension, and sentence structure prior to teaching the text for both sections. Six weeks later, a post-test was administered to both groups to assess the impact of parallel reading text in comparison to monolingual English text on students' reading skills. Results of the post-test showed an increase in the average scores of both groups. There was a noticeable increase of the average scores in the vocabulary section and sentence structure awareness of the post-test among students of the experimental group compared to the average scores of their peers in the controlled group. Nevertheless, the results did not reveal a significant difference between using the two techniques in regard to reading comprehension and sentence structure awareness.

Introduction

Students at Birzeit University are required to complete English courses as university requirement, each to their level. Birzeit University has adopted Cambridge Unlock English teaching program for the academic year 2016/ 2017. The program has four levels: Remedial (A1), Intermediate I (A2), Intermediate II (BI), and Advanced (B2). Freshman students who enter BZU must sit for a placement test and are placed in the appropriate level based on their score. To advance from one level to another, students at BZU are required to complete a minimum of 150 to 180 instructional hours spread over two semesters. The Unlock Cambridge courses are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which divides language activities into four kinds: reception (listening and reading), production (spoken and written), interaction (spoken and written), and mediation (translating and interpreting).

Literature Review

In the field of second language teaching and language learning there is an ongoing debate on the role and the use of learners' first language in foreign and second language learning classrooms (Cummins, 2005,2007; Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Turnbull& Daily-O'Cain, 2009; Cook, 2005). On one hand, there are advocates of monolingual teaching policies who perceive L1 in the second language learning classrooms as an impediment and counter- productive to language learning. On the other hand, there are linguists, theorists, and researchers who regard L1 as an effective resource and cognitive tool that enhances L2 learning (Cummins, 2005,2007; Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain, 2009; Cook, 2005).

Monolingual Teaching

Advocates for second and foreign language learning argue that there is little pedagogical or communicative value in the first language in second and foreign classrooms (Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain, 2009). One main rationale for advocating the monolingual principle is that in a foreign language teaching context there are fewer opportunities for the target language exposure. The classroom is the main place where students have exposure to the language so it is essential to maximize the use of the target language in the limited class time available. Proponents of monolingual policies draw on Krashen's 1982 comprehensible input hypothesis that languages are learned most effectively when learners are exposed to lots of comprehensible input. They argue that exposing learners to extensive periods of comprehensible TL input will ensure mastery of the target language. Ellis, (2005) confirms that the more exposure to L2 the learners receive, the more and the faster they will learn. Therefore, it is essential that teachers as the linguistic model for the students maximize the use of the L2 inside the classroom to ensure adequate access. In a classroom setting, the L2 needs to be the medium and the object of instruction (Ellis, 2005). Another factor that may have contributed to the support of monolingual teaching policies can be attributed to what linguists refer to as the "negative transfer" between the learners' first language and the second language (Odlin, 1989). Errors made by second language learners which could be explained by the persistence of the habits of their first language and their transfer to the new language have led some educators to believe that avoiding interference from the learner's first language is necessary in effective language teaching and learning (Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain, 2009).

Many teaching methods and educational programs may have also played a significant role in promoting instruction exclusively through the target language (McMillan &Turnbull, 2009). With the development of language teaching methods during what Howatt and Smith (2014) refer to as the "Reform Period", there was a shift away from traditional teaching topics like grammar and literature towards a command of the spoken language (Howatt & Smith, 2014). Teaching and learning of spoken language have led to the emergence of the direct method, natural method, and Berlitz method (Howatt & Smith, 2014). Basically, the direct method and audio-lingual method assert that students need to 'think in the TL' and avoid interference from their first language (Hall & Cook, 2012). To make this happen, the TL and the L1 are kept as separate as possible (Hall & Cook, 2012). For many second and foreign-language educators, any notion of first language use in language teaching and learning is associated with the grammar- translation method which is detested by communicative

language proponents (Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain, 2009).

The work of Maximilian Berlitz was a major source for monolingual teaching methods that ban the use of the student's native language in the classroom (Hall & Cook, 2012). Berlitz monolingual teaching philosophy, as cited by Hall and Cook (2012), states that in the classroom, authentic life situations should be resembled through immersing the learners in the new language without the need for introducing a concept in the student's first language. According to Hall and Cook (2012), several factors may have led to the widespread of Berlitz schools with its monolingual teaching methods. One factor can be attributed to the fact that bilingual teaching might be unattainable with learners of different first languages and native language instructors who do not necessarily know the language(s) of their students (Hall & Cook, 2012). Such teaching and learning contexts provided publishers of monolingual products and language schools with the opportunity to promote and market their products without the need of input from the speakers of other languages (Hall & Cook, 2012).

Target-language immersion programs might have had a significant role in the advancement of exclusive target language use in second and foreign language teaching (McMillan & Turnbull, 2009). The main principle of these programs is based on the sole use of target language. Many educators around the world perceived their success in producing bilingual learners as a rationale to support exclusive reliance on target language by teachers and students in second and foreign language teaching (Turnbull & Daily- O'Cain, 2009).

Why First Language in an L2 Classroom Setting?

 Many linguists and language research scholars challenge the policies of exclusive use of TL in the second and foreign language classrooms (Turnbull & Daily- O'Cain, 2009). Cummins (2005, 2007) asserts that instructional policies that are dominated by monolingual instructional methods are not supported by empirical research evidence and the way bilingual and multilingual minds function. He further argues that monolingual instruction through the exclusive use of the target language is inefficacious and inconsistent with the reality of interdependence across languages as it deprives the learners from using their first language as a resource for L2 learning. Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain (2009) state that in variance with the support of monolingual instructional policies, small amounts of first language use may be effective in achieving more comprehensible input and target-language production. They further assert that the cognitive benefits of the first language can be relevant if learners' skills in the target language are limited especially when they face challenging learning tasks.

Cummins (2005, 2007), perceives the L1 of the learners as a cognitive and linguistic resource for learning. He states that L1 can function as a tool to scaffold "more accomplished performances" in L2. Cook (2005) shares similar views with Cummins by stating that similar to any other source, the learner's first language is just as effective in conveying new meanings or words or constructions. Cummins (2005,2007) promotes the use of learners first language in the classroom on the basis of three major principles: 1. the interdependence hypothesis 2. cognitive psychology research which highlights the significance of the student's prior knowledge in language learning, and 3. cross lingual transfer.

Cummins' underlying linguistic hypothesis states that underlying the special surface features of every language, there are common proficiencies across languages which allows for the transfer of cognitively demanding tasks from one language to another. He asserts that such cross-lingual transfer is a necessary condition that should be encouraged for successful bilingual development among learners. Consequently, Cummins states that instructors should draw the learners' attention to similarities and differences between L1 and L2 in order to reach efficient learning of a second language.

In regard to prior knowledge, Cummins (2005, 2007) refers to it as the sum of the learner's experience that shape the student's identity and cognitive functions. It is not just the information or skills acquired in an instructional context. He states that prior knowledge is relevant to cross-linguistic transfer since it is encoded in the first language of the learner. He further argues that since the learners' prior knowledge is encoded in their first language, then it should logically follow that their L1 is significant to their learning even if the instruction is restricted to L2. Cummins (2007) concludes that monolingual instruction which deprives the learners from activating their prior knowledge through their L1 is an impediment to the learning of L2 and is therefore likely to limit what they can produce through L2.

Several researches were conducted to study the effectiveness of first language on second language learning. Their findings indicate that first language may contribute to student target-language comprehension, use, and learning. For example, Turnbull & McMillan (2009) cited Swain and Lapkin (2000) who have reported that Grade 8 early French immersion students were able to complete a group task more successfully by using some L1. Cummins cited Antón and DiCamilla (1998) study which analyzed the functions of adult students use of English as their L1 while working together to complete a writing task in Spanish as their L2. The results show that the L1 was used to facilitate scaffolding during pair work. The study concluded that students use their L1 in problem-solving tasks and employed it to access L2 linguistic forms.

Limitations on the Use of L1 in Class

Despite their support for the use of first language in second language learning, its proponents call for judicious and caution against the overuse of L1. (Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain ,2009; Cummins, 2005, 2007; Ellis, 2005). Even though Turnbull and Daily- O' Cian (2009) assert that small amount of L1 in second language learning can lead to more comprehensible input, they confirm that they do not give a "passing license" to the use of the first language in the second or foreign language classroom. They clearly state that teachers and learners of a second language should not be dependent on the first language use. They further assert that in the classroom setting, any practices that undermine the target language as the ultimate goal of learning must be avoided. Cook (2009) shares similar views by stating that the use of the first language in the classroom should not be taken to an extreme, and it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide as much input in the second language as possible.

Butzcamm and Caldwell (2009) make a distinction between a functional use of the target language and a traditional monolingual practice. They state that lessons should be conducted in the target language. However,

the first language has a mediating role to move from a focus on form to a focus on message and to help establish the target language as the medium of instruction. They strongly advise instructors of second language classes to explain lessons monolingual and proceed bilingually in what they refer to as the "sandwich technique". With this technique, the instructor makes a statement in L2, followed by a restatement in L1 and again in L2. They claim that this is a sort of "whispered interpreting" that can create an authentic classroom communication.

What does Parallel Text Provide?

The rationale behind the use of the parallel text in this study and in the implementation of class instructions is based on the following assumptions:

1. Parallel text is a learning source to help students activate their prior knowledge on the topic of the reading text.
2. It is used to compare and contrast between the sentence structure of both L1 and L2 texts.
3. It is used to provide an equivalent vocabulary of the L2 terms in the L1.
4. It allows for more noticing of the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 texts.

The Principle of Dual Comprehension

One of the main functions of the classroom is to provide the learners with a maximum amount of fully comprehended texts (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009). In regard to text reading, Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) identify two levels of comprehension; functional and formal. They claim that if we want to learn a language, we have to understand not only what is meant, but how things are "literally" expressed. Only when learners understand both meaning and form, they can turn input into intake which enables them to make utterances on their own. Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) claim that the mediation of first language is of critical importance to develop a comprehensible input.

Bilingual texts can help the learners become successful independent readers by overcoming the lexical barrier that they might encounter (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009). The parallel text in this study (English and Arabic) will enable the learners to understand the text with less difficulty since the L2 translation is provided. If the students lack the knowledge of a lexical item, they can turn to L1 text to figure it out independently.

Noticing, Attention, and Comparison

According to Schmidt's noticing hypothesis, an input becomes intake for language learners once it is consciously noticed (Schmidt, 2010). Schmidt (2010) distinguishes between noticing specific instances of language and understanding. Noticing, according to Schmidt, happens when learners attend to the linguistic features of the language that they are exposed to. Understanding on the other hand, is a higher level of awareness that includes generalizations across instances (Schmidt, 2010).

Since the aim of this study is to examine the support of the L1 text in regard to vocabulary, comprehension, and

sentence structure to L2 learning, students will attend to vocabulary equivalents in both texts, the order of words, and the meanings they are associated with in both texts. The reading materials provided in both L1 and L2 for this study will be read at the same time. The text will start with the English paragraph followed by a parallel text in Arabic.

This setting provides the students with the chance to go back and forth between the two texts to make necessary comparisons between the two languages. By going back and forth between the two texts, learners can also notice the difference in the sentence structure of both languages. Being aware of these differences will assist them in making correct generalizations to facilitate their learning.

Significance of the study

This study intends to examine the effect of using a parallel text strategy (English and Arabic) on Intermediate II level students' reading skills. It is an attempt to examine a teaching method that might support our students' proficiency in regard to their English reading skills and to provide a scaffolding tool for our students who show significant weaknesses in their learning of English as a foreign language. In our EFL classrooms, there is a minimum use of the L1 especially on behalf of the instructors. In fact, the official guidelines of our institute recommend the sole use of the second language as a teaching medium. Nonetheless, the findings of this study may provide additional teaching techniques supported with the use of L1 that intend to enrich the existing methodologies which will serve the purpose of effective teaching of English as a second language.

Research Questions

This experimental study attempts to answer the following questions:
1. Does parallel text strategy provide a stronger support to student's reading comprehension as they move into their EFL learning?
2. Will L2 students benefit more from using a parallel text strategy than those who only use monolingual text in regard to improving their syntax awareness; sentence structure of English as a second language?
3. Will parallel text strategy enhance students' retention of vocabulary as they move into their EFL learning?

Methodology
Research Group

The study sample consisted of 38 students in two sections of Intermediate II level English at Birzeit University. The first section represented the controlled group which was taught the reading passage with English only text and the other section was the experimental group that was taught the reading passage using a parallel text (English and Arabic). The two sections were the researcher's students during the first semester of 2019/2020. The participants were from various faculties and different year levels (see Table 1, 2, and 3).

Table 1. Distribution of Students according to their Gender

| Variable | | Text language | | | |
| | | Bilingual Text | | English only | |
		Count	%	Count	%
Gender	Male	11	57.9%	9	47.4%
	Female	8	42.1%	10	52.6%

Table 2. Distribution of Students according to their Academic Year

| Variable | | Text language | | | |
| | | Bilingual Text | | English only | |
		Count	%	Count	%
Academic Year	First	11	57.9%	12	63.2%
	second	5	26.3%	7	36.8%
	Third	1	5.3%	0	0.0%
	Fourth	2	10.5%	0	0.0%

Table 3. Distribution of Students according to their Faculty

| Variable | | Text language | | | |
| | | Bilingual Text Group | | English only Group | |
		Count	%	Count	%
Faculty	Faculty of Business and Commerce	4	21.2%	12	63.6%
	Faculty of Arts	6	31.8%	1	5.3%
	Faculty of Engineering and Technology	7	37.1%	4	21.2%
	Faculty of Law and Public Administration	2	10.6%	1	5.3%
	Faculty of Pharmacy, Nursing, and Health Professions	0	0.0%	1	5.3%

Instrument and Material

This study employed a pre-test and a post-test-a quasi-experiment- to assess the students' language skills in terms of vocabulary retention, reading comprehension, and sentence structure awareness. The test was designed by the researcher. The pre and the post test questions were divided into three major sections; vocabulary, reading comprehension and sentence structure questions (see Appendix A and B). The first section consisted of ten vocabulary terms for which students were asked to translate from English to Arabic. The vocabulary section total grade was 10 points. The second part consisted of four reading comprehension questions on the passage that totaled 7 points. The last section was a question on ordering words to form complete sentences. This

question was worth 3 points. For both tests, the students used the English only text.

The pre-test was administered to both groups prior to the lesson on the target reading text. The pretest was taken by 29 students in each section. The duration for the pre-test was about 50 minutes of the class time. About six weeks later, both groups were given the posttest. Both groups were provided with an English only text and were asked to answer the same questions as the pre-test. Out of the 29 students of the experimental group only 19 students took the post-test. Therefore, a similar number of the controlled group was randomly picked to match that number.

The two tests were scored manually by the instructor. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS was used to calculate the averages for the student scores for both tests. For the reading lessons on the studied passage, the controlled group used the English only text and the experimental group was provided with the parallel text for the reading passage.

Experiment Design

The reading lesson on the target text for the controlled group began the following class after the administration of the pre-test. The reading lesson began with a whole group discussion. It started by activating prior knowledge on the topic by discussing the topic, the title, any pictures, and key vocabulary words. The discussions were in English only. No Arabic translation of any key terms was provided by the instructor in an attempt to reduce the effect of L1 use on the students' post- test scores.

After the whole group discussion, the class was divided into groups of four. Students were given comprehension questions on the text and were instructed to read the text in their groups and answer the questions. The researcher was observing the students while they were working in teams. Students were reading and discussing the text within their groups. While they were doing their work, the majority of students were translating the text to one another and discussing the text in Arabic as well as English.

During the following class, the text was read and discussed as a whole class. Each group was asked to provide an answer to a question and participate in the discussion. The language of the discussion was English only. In addition to the questions that were given to the students, the class continued with the reading activities provided in their books on the same text.

The same teaching method was followed as with the experimental group. The lesson started with activating prior knowledge on the text through discussing the topic, the title, pictures on the text, and key vocabulary terms. During the discussion, Arabic translation was provided by the instructor to key terms on the text.

After the whole group discussion, the class was divided into groups of four. A parallel text was provided to each group. The text began with an English language for each paragraph followed by an Arabic parallel text. Students were asked to read the text together and answer the same questions that were provided to the controlled group.

During their work, the researcher was observing the students while they were working in their groups. Similar to the controlled group, students were reading and discussing the text within their groups. They were reading the text in both languages and discussing their answers to the questions mostly in Arabic.

During the next class, the same procedure was followed as with the controlled group. The text was read and discussed in both languages. During the discussion, the instructor highlighted the Arabic translation to key words. Students' attention was directed to the difference in sentence structure of both text by going back and forth between the text in the two languages. The students also completed the activities on the same text in their reading books.

Results and Discussion

A data analysis and comparison between the results of the two tests and the results of both post-tests are provided in the following section. The following figures (Figure 1, 2, and 3) show the average scores for each section on both tests.
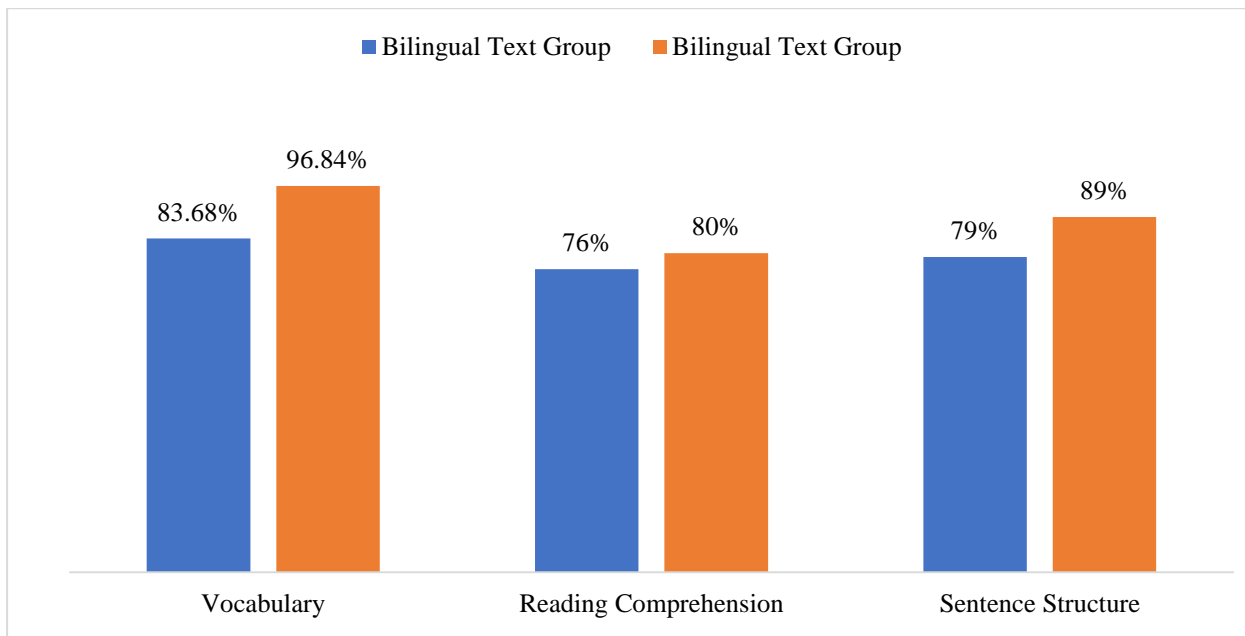

Figure 1. Comparison between Pre and post-test Scores of the Bilingual Group

By analyzing the results for the average scores on the pre-and post-tests, we can conclude the following:

1. The average scores on the three sections for the two groups showed an increase in the post-test results.

2. There was a significant increase in the average scores of the post-test for the parallel text group in the vocabulary section (13%), followed by an increase of about 10% in sentence structure awareness, and 4% increase in the reading comprehension section.

3. There was an increase in the average scores of the experimental group in the comprehension and the sentence structure portion of the post- test, yet their average scores were lower than that of the controlled group.
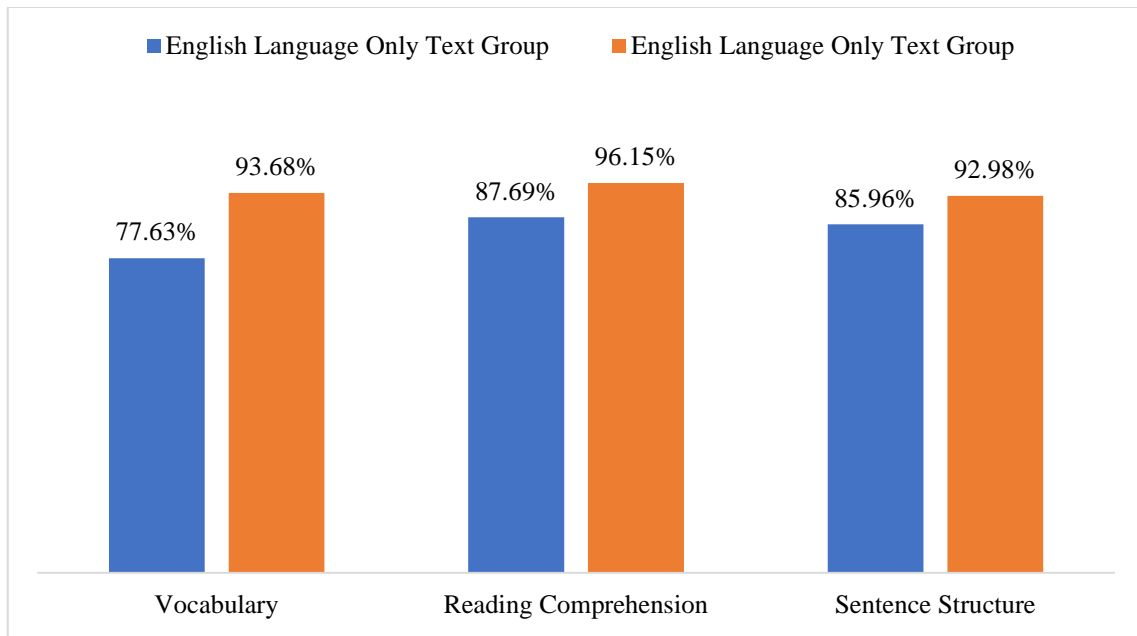
Figure 2. Comparison of Pre and Post-test scores of the English only Group

By examining the increase of the scores for the experimental group in the post-test, we can conclude that using the parallel text variable may have contributed in supporting this increase. These results, especially the increase of scores in the vocabulary section, demonstrate the effective use of L1 in teaching L2 as supported by several linguists and researchers (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Cook, 2005; Cummins, 2005, 2007; Turnbull & Daily-O'Cain, 2009). However, if we compare the same increase in scores to the increase of average scores in the English only group, the parallel text might not be as effective considering the fact that the same lesson plans were followed with both groups with similar variables expect for the use of the parallel text with the experimental group.
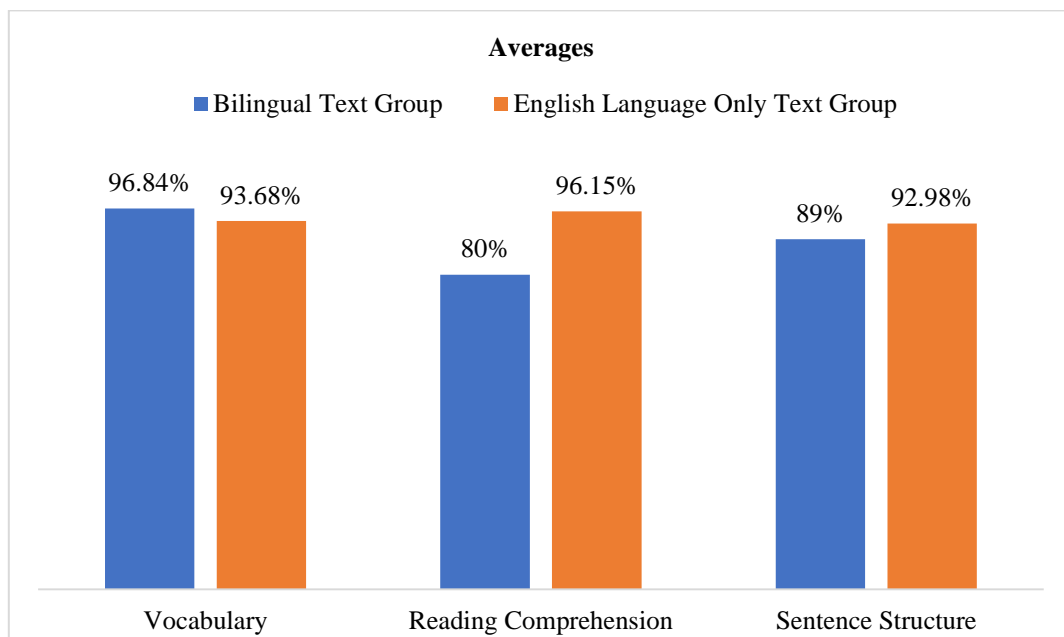

Figure 3. Overall Comparison of Post-test Scores

When we compare the percentage of increase in the post test to that in the pretest scores for both classes, the highest increase in favor of the parallel group was 10% in the sentence structure awareness section of the test compared to 7% for the English only text. If we calculate the difference between the average scores in the vocabulary section of the pre and post tests for both groups, the numbers will show a higher increase in favor of the English only group by 16% compared to 13% increase for the parallel text group. The same thing is true for the increase in the reading comprehension scores with an 8% increase for the English only as compared to a gain of 4% for the parallel text group.

If we consider that the method of instruction was similar for both classes and the same lesson plans were followed for both groups during the reading class to the best of my knowledge, I can attribute this discrepancy of scores to the fact that students or at least some students in the English only section have a higher level of English command compared to their peers in the parallel text section. This variable is supported by the pre-test average scores in which the English only group scored higher than those of the parallel text group in both the reading comprehension and sentence structure sections of the test.

Conclusion

A comparison of the pre- and post- tests results of the participants have showed an overall increase in the post-test results for the experimental group learners. On the one hand this may be an indication of positive contributions of the parallel text strategy to the L2 learners in all three domains. On the other hand, the higher increase of the post-test scores for the English only group posed a challenging question: To what extent can we attribute the gains in the pot-test to the use of parallel text? There might not be a definite answer to this question in this study. But what is certain, is that the use of the parallel text in this study did not reveal a negative impact on the participants' L2 learning outcome. This conclusion is aligned with advocates of L1 use in L2 language learning who perceive the judicious us of L1 as a scaffold tool that can enhance the performance of L2 learners.

Based on my experience as a second language instructor, it is very hard, if not impossible, to eliminate the first language use during the collaborative work of students in a second language learning environment especially when the majority of these students share the same L1. Furthermore, if we consider the parallel text as one form of L1 in an L2 learning classroom, other forms of L1 were also evident within the collaborative work of the students in this study. As I have noted in my observations of both the controlled and experimental groups, there was a significant use of the students' L1 during their discussions of the reading passage. They were translating key terms and explaining terms to one another in their L1.

Other forms of L1 use also included students' annotation of their reading text in both languages. To conclude, in the field of second language learning there is an ongoing search for teaching and learning methods to support L2 learners. This experimental study is just another example of that continuous search for an effective tool that might support students' proficiency in regard to their English reading skills and to provide a scaffolding tool for struggling students who show significant weaknesses in their learning of English as a foreign language.

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Appendix A. Reading Passage English only Text

Endangered Species

A. An endangered species is a group of animals that could soon become extinct. Extinction happens when the last of the species has died out and there will be no more. Many species are nearly extinct and could disappear off the face of the earth very soon if we don't do anything to save them. There are many reasons why species become endangered but most of them are due to humans. However, there are things that we can do to save endangered species.

B. Habitat destruction is the main reason why animals become endangered and this happens in two ways. When humans move into a new area, the animal's habitat – where they live – is destroyed and there is nothing to eat because humans chop down trees and build houses and farms. Animal habitats are also destroyed because of pollution. Chemicals in rivers and poisons on farms cause the destruction of habitats and animals can no longer live there.

C. Endangered species are also the result of hunting and fishing. Animals such as the Arabian oryx have been hunted to the edge of extinction because of the high price of their meat. Other animals are killed for their fur, bones or skin, or just for sport. Some seal species are now on the average of extinction because they are killed for their fur to make coats. Tigers are shot to make medicine and tea from their bones, and crocodiles are caught to make bags and shoes. Overfishing means that large sea creatures like whales, tuna and sharks have all become endangered species, because too many are caught to make things like shark's fin soup.

D. So what can individuals and governments do to protect animals and plants species from becoming endangered? We should take care not to pollute natural areas, and farmers or companies who destroy animal habitats should face a financial penalty. The public can help out by refusing to buy any products that are made from animals' body parts, such as seal fur coats or crocodile bags. Governments can help, too, by making it against the law to hunt, fish or trade in endangered species. They can also provide funding for animal sanctuaries and zoos, to protect animals from extinction by breeding more endangered animals, which they later release into the wild. If we all cooperate by taking these steps, we will protect our planet so that our children and their children can enjoy it too.

Appendix B. Pre/post Test Questions

Student Name and Number _____

I. Use the reading passage to translate the following vocabulary words into Arabic.

1. Endangered _____

2. extinct   _____

4. environment _____

5. pollution _____

6. sanctuaries _____

7. wild life _____

8. habitat _____

9. illegal _____

10. hunt _____

II. Answer the following comprehension questions based on the reading passage.

1. Why does pollution and chopping down trees cause problems for animals?

_____

_____

_____

2. What do people hunt animals for?

_____

_____

_____

3. Name two things that individuals can do to protect animals from becoming endangered

a. _____

b. _____

4. What should governments do about hunting and fishing?

III. Put the following words in the correct order to form complete sentences.

1. and individuals / to help protect animals /. /governments/ should work together/ from becoming endangered

2. provide them with/./animals habitat/ food and shelter/

3. if humans/ could become extinct/ to save them/. /many endangered species/do not act now/