

Impacts of mother tongue on English as a second language learning performance of primary grades students – A case study of Ampara district

M.S.F. Masna^{1*}

¹Department of Languages, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Sabaragamuwa University, Sri Lanka

Mother tongue (L1) is acquired unconsciously from birth. English is widely used as a second language (L2). Using L1 in English as a Second Language (ESL) context is controversial due to its effect on the L2 performance. In Kalmunai Zone, the excessive L1 use at the primary level leads to poorer L2 performance. This study explored how L1 influences L2 performance in primary students in Kalmunai Zone, focusing on its impact on the four language skills. 318 students from grades 4 and 5 participated in the tests, and 24 students were interviewed. ESL teachers from six schools were given questionnaires. The study assessed L2 performance of all four language skills and examined the errors related to L1 influence. The interviews explored the impacts, and the teacher perceptions were gathered via the questionnaires. The study revealed the negative impacts of L1 in the areas of pronunciation, be verbs, sentence structure, prepositions, articles, tenses, capitalization, possessive apostrophe, consonant doubling, fricatives, short vowels and consonant clusters in each language learning skill with diverse ratio. The students substituted sounds from L1 and mispronounced complex spellings and tended to use L1 structure (SOV) in English (SVO). Therefore, this study indicated the negative impacts of L1 by highlighting the aforementioned conventions. These impacts stem from the overuse of L1 and the differences in linguistic structures between L1 and L2. Bilingual approach is recommended for the learners in Kalmunai zone, with a focus on comparative grammar instruction by addressing the key differences between L1 and L2 to reduce L1 interference in L2 performance.

Keywords: Impacts, Mother tongue (L1), Primary students, Performance, Second language learning (L2)

*jazeal@hotmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0041-0807>