

Chapter 62: Language Immersion

Thabet Alwadani

University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, USA.

1 Introduction

I have been teaching English for more than ten years in one of Jazan region's rural areas. Rural areas in Saudi Arabia share similar characteristics such as shortage of public services, the roughness of the roads and low population. Public schools are affected by these features positively and negatively. Schools in rural areas have fewer students than the suburban schools which is an advantage, but they lack technological facilities and have weak internet connections. When it comes to second language learning, these kinds of deficiencies result in noticeable negative impacts such as the amount of exposure to the English language. The amount of exposure can be increased under the umbrella of language immersion approach.

2 Contexts

The Saudi educational system is a centralized system in which the education administrations in Saudi regions carry out the decisions that are made by the ministry of education. Under each regional administration, there are educational offices which supervise the public schools. Alkoroos elementary and intermediate school, where I teach, has 75 students and 19 teachers. The classrooms are small and not technologically equipped. The school day starts at seven o'clock in the morning and ends at two o'clock in the afternoon. There are usually seven periods every day and each period takes 45 minutes. The students start learning the English language in the fourth grade. The McGraw Hill company provides English textbooks. The textbook series is "We Can" for the elementary stage and "Super Goal" for the intermediate stage. Elementary school students (i.e. fourth, fifth and sixth graders) have two periods weekly for studying the English language. In the intermediate school, the number of periods for English classes increases to be four periods. The students mostly do not have the opportunity to practice English outside schools. This means they are not exposed to the language in a way that improves their language.

3 Proposed Solution

Language Exposure

Second language acquisition studies have indicated the crucial role of exposure in second language acquisition. Thus, the teacher must establish a teaching environment that increases the amount of exposure to the language. The amount of exposure to language can be maximized by different strategies. My goal has been not only to increase the opportunities for practicing English but also to accomplish this during the school hours without adding more to the teacher's workload. I have been looking for teaching practices that can contribute to attaining that goal.

4 School Immersion Program

Last February, I was one of the Saudi teachers who were chosen by the Saudi Ministry of Education to be trained at the University of Delaware. Our training program is called (Building Leadership for Change through School Immersion). This program aims to improve Saudi education through collaboration with the advanced educational systems around the world. Several ideas have crystallized in my minds so far. One of these ideas is the language immersion teaching method in which the target language is used for instruction on other academic topics. This method is believed to enhance cognitive skills and improve test performance. Many countries, such as Canada and the United States have successfully adopted this method in teaching different languages. It has influenced my philosophy regarding the exposure problem, and I have begun to consider it as a proper solution.

5 Language immersions

“Language immersion, or simply immersion, is a technique used in bilingual language education in which two languages are used for instruction in a variety of topics, including math, science, or social studies” (Language immersion, “n.d., para. 1). In the Saudi context, where English is taught as a foreign language, the immersion would be a foreign language immersion in which the learners are immersed in a foreign language within the school hours through a variety of instructions. There are two major kinds of foreign language immersion; total and partial immersion. In the total immersion, all the school subjects are taught in the target language, whereas in the partial immersion only some of the subjects are taught in the target language. (Fortune & Tedick, 2003). In the United States, the foreign language immersion was established in 1971, and it has been seen as a powerful approach in language teaching. (Curtain & Dahlberg,

2004). There have been dozens of foreign language programs in the United States such as Spanish, French, Japanese and other languages programs.

6 Rationale: Why this is the best idea

Many approaches have been applied to achieve a high level of proficiency language teaching. One these is language immersion which has been considered one of the most effective approach in language teaching. Genesee, (1994). After reviewing the evaluation of language immersion programs in Canada and the United States by concentrating on specific areas in Second language learning, the review supports the previous studies that see the language immersion as the most effective strategy in teaching English as a second language in the school context. It also indicates the absence of negative impacts of the language immersion on the first language which promote the incorporation of this method. In addition to that, I interviewed DR Marina (2018), the applied linguist and the supervisor of Greek language immersion in Odyssey Charter School in Wilmington, Delaware. She shed lights on the benefits of language immersion in terms of cognitive skills and academic achievements. According to Dr. Marina, the student’s cognitive skills would improve by being exposed intensively to two languages at the same time. The students would experience two different cultures, thinking styles and language structures. In addition to that, the students’ last year result in Odyssey Charter school showed that comparing with non-immersion students, the language immersion students have achieved a higher level of achievement in a first and second language as well as the other content areas. This finding can dispel the fears of the negative impact of second language immersion on the first language. The benefits of language immersion not only for language

learning but also improve other content areas learning. According to Bergström, Klatte, Steinbrink & Lachmann, T. (2016), two age-matched kindergarten children groups were examined in first and second language context. The first group participated in partial immersion programs, whereas the second group had been taught through English courses. After 2.5 years, the results showed that the immersion groups had achieved a higher level of proficiency in English receptive skills than the courses group. It also demonstrates that the second language learning did not affect the first language

7 Implementation:

The first stage (March 2019 - March 2020)

Generally, the implementation of the language immersion approach must rely on a policy in which educators, parents, and decision-makers work together to develop best teaching practices and reflect on the outcomes regularly as Soderman, A. K. (2010) Explained. Another consideration is that children must be aware of the benefits of acquiring another language which would pave the way for them to be active members in the future world and to build their cognitive skills. Moreover, in order to improve language learning, the students' language growth must be accompanied by academic growth and this improvement should be consistent as the writer suggests. Genesee, F. (1994).

The situation in the Saudi centralized educational system is challenging because the ministry of education is the sole decision maker. One possible way to facilitate the immersion approach is to employ a gradual process to integrate language immersion within the current school schedule. This can be achieved by manipulating the weekly general activity hours in which students engage in a variety of activities depending on their interests. The incorporation of the language immersion would go through many stages.

The first stage will include the following steps: Firstly, I would introduce the idea of language immersion to my colleagues and form a team for this mission. Secondly, I would collaborate with other content area teachers to select easy and interesting Arabic subject topics and develop English equivalents for each topic. Finally, I would place this new learning opportunity as a choice in the activity list for fourth graders. This first stage would serve as a starting point for this project which must be followed by stages that expand the experience by generating additional subjects and topics and increasing the amount of activity time. The following table shows the steps that would be taken from **March 2019 to March 2020**.

What	when	who	How
1-Introducing the idea of language immersion and my gradual plan for its implementation	March 17- April 21	I introduce the concept to my school's teachers, students, and administration	PLC meeting - regular teacher meeting – workshops – My google site and other online resources

2-Creating a mission team in the school	April 25 – May 10	Me- English teachers – other content areas teachers	depending on the first step meeting and discussion, those who are interested and ready to work will be the mission team
3-Choosing and creating equivalent English contents	July 21- August 29	Mission team + other content areas teachers	Choosing courses then topics based on my school immersion experience and my team experiences.
			Developing materials
4-Placing that contents on the school schedule (activity hour)	September 5- October 31	School administration – Activity department supervisors – mission team	Manipulating school schedule and activity hours to develop a theme- based immersion schedule
4- Running the theme- based immersion schedule during activity hours	November 5/2019 – February 28, 2020	Mission team- English teachers – other content areas teachers -students	4 days a week – one hour – fourth grade

The success of language immersion in my rural area would encourage other rural areas to adopt it. Moreover, this method would be one of the powerful approaches to enhance the level of Saudi student's proficiency in the English language which is seen as a critical factor of the Saudi current educational and economic reforms. However, the implementation might face several challenges. One of which is the time limit that can be overcome by creative planning and gradual application. In addition to that, teachers should explore ways in which they motivate their students to benefit from the new language opportunity. Dornyei & Csizer (1998) have suggested ten commandments to motivate language learners. These commandments can be summarized in three essential demands which are enthusiastic and prepared teachers, interesting and exciting content, and a supportive and interactive learning environment that will result in a motivated language learner.

8 Impact Evaluation Plan

As mentioned earlier, the implementation would go through several steps. Thus, the evaluation would be conducted step by step as the following table demonstrates.

step	Evaluation date	Evaluation tools
Introducing the ideas	April 21- 24 (2019)	Surveys (school staff+ students, interview teachers)
Creating the mission team	May 10 – 12 (2019)	By the end of this step, the team will be evaluated based on the existence of the following :quantity (3-5) would be acceptable, diversity (English teachers + other teachers + administration) and developing a plan
Selecting and creating English contexts	August 29- September 4	The evaluation of the content would be according to three criteria 1- responding to students' needs 2- number of content courses (Math, Geography (suggested by Dr. Marina in the interview), etc.) 2 or more
		3- being interesting (a variety of activities and materials...etc.)
Placing in the school schedule (activity hour)	October 31 – November 4	Teacher and students satisfaction (meeting, surveys, and interviews)
Running the schedule	1- December 25- 27 2- February 24- 28	School monthly academic regular reports in English course and other courses + students, parents and teachers

9 Conclusions

The lack of resources in my rural school has led to remarkable language teaching challenges regarding language exposure. Although the amount of exposure might rise by the application of the language immersion approach, the implementation of this method in the Saudi context requires a high level of adjustment to proceed effectively. My application plan would take about one year which is considered to be the first stage of this gradual language immersion program. The successful incorporation of this action plan would promote the expansion of this micro immersion program in terms of content, classes or even new schools. It also would contribute to introducing the concept of language immersion into Saudi English teaching context.

References

- [1] Bergström, K., Klatte, M., Steinbrink, C., & Lachmann, T. (2016). First and Second Language Acquisition in German Children Attending a Kindergarten Immersion Program: A Combined Longitudinal and Cross-Sectional Study. *Language Learning*, 66(2), 386-418
- [2] Curtain, H., & Dahlberg, C. A. (2004). *Languages and children: Making the match* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- [3] Dörnyei, Z., & Csizér, K. (1998). Ten commandments for motivating language learners: Results of an empirical study. *Language Teaching Research*, 2(3), 203-229.
- [4] Fortune, T. W., & Tedick, D. J. (2003). What parents want to know about foreign language immersion programs. *ERIC Digest*. Washington DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED482493).
- [5] Genesee, F. (1994). Integrating language and content: Lessons from immersion.
- [6] Mattheoudakis, M. Professor in Applied linguistics who supervises the Greek language immersion at Odyssey Charter school I Wilmington, Delaware (2018, October 17). Personal interview
- [7] Soderman, A. K. (2010). Language Immersion Programs for Young Children?: Yes... but Proceed with Caution. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(8), 54-61.
- [8] Wikipedia contributors. (2018, December 17). Language immersion. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 06:12, December 20, 2018, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Language_immersion&oldid=874169708