Research Article

Target Language Use among DLIFLC Faculty and Students

Dawn Bikowski, PhD
Advisor to the Provost, Office of Standardization and Academic Excellence (OSAE)

Shensheng Zhu, PhD
Associate Provost & Director, Office of Standardization and Academic Excellence (OSAE)

A considerable body of research has shown the benefits of target language use in language instruction; challenges and questions remain, however, in terms of how to use the target language effectively. To emphasize the importance of target language use at DLIFLC, the Target Language Use Command Policy #21 was issued in October 2022 and reinforced in July 2024. This research project was conducted two years after the policy was originally issued (i.e., from February to August 2024) and sought to evaluate the implementation of the policy, as well as to identify best practices for target language use in Basic Courses. Six Undergraduate Education (UGE) languages were studied: Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Persian Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. Data collection consisted of aggregated and anonymized End of Program Student Questionnaire, (ESQ) ratings and comments; 20 classroom observations; 15 interviews with deans and chairs; and survey results for faculty (N=83) and students (N=222). Quantitatively, students and faculty report that the Target Language Use Command Policy is generally followed by faculty and students and that schools and teachers enforce the policy. For example, in their ESQ final course evaluations, students reported that their teachers "ensured that the target language was the primary language in the classroom" at a level of 3.73 out of 4.0 (N=6,631), and a majority of faculty respondents reported that the policy is enforced in their school (4.06/5.0). Yet interviews, observations, and survey comments reveal challenges to implementing the policy and opportunities for training and greater enforcement.

Keywords: *Target Language Use, Effective Teaching Practices, Faculty Development and Training*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A considerable body of research has shown the benefits of teachers and students using the target language (TL) in language instruction, including increased student learning and increased student motivation (see Turnbull & Arnett, 2002); however, challenges and questions remain in terms of how to do so effectively, such as proficiency level considerations, how to manage grammar instruction, and validity in assessment. DLIFLC has long had policies to emphasize the crucial role of TL use in foreign language study, yet implementing these policies in day-to-day practice among teachers and students can be complicated. To emphasize the importance of target language use at DLIFLC, the Target Language Use Command Policy #21 was issued in October 2022 and reinforced in July 2024. The aim of this study, conducted approximately a year and a half after the policy was issued, was to evaluate the implementation of the policy and best practices for target language use in Undergraduate Education's (UGE) Basic Course programs for six National Defense Strategy (NDS) languages: Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Persian Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. Following policies is crucial and expected at a military educational institution such as DLIFLC; how effectively the policy is being implemented and how to increase effectiveness when necessary are key concepts that guided this research project with the goal of furthering our mission to produce warrior linguists for the U.S. Department of Defense.

For the sake of clarity, this article will use ACTFL's definition of the TL: "The use of target language refers to all that learners say, read, hear, write, and view – production and reception of language on the part of learners, educators, and materials" (actfl.org). TL use, thus, expands from the teacher to the student to instructional materials and assessments. At DLIFLC, because the final graduation tests include some English in addition to the TL, it is necessary for some of the curricular materials to be in English in order to prepare students. This is not in opposition to the policy, yet emphasizes the importance of utilizing maximum classroom time for the use of the TL by teachers and students.

Challenges in Teaching in the Target Language

DLIFLC courses are fast-paced and demanding, with students needing to achieve Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) scores of 2 (intermediate level) in reading and listening and an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) score 1+ in speaking within a relatively short period of time (e.g., 36 weeks for Spanish, 48 weeks for Russian or Persian Farsi, and 64 weeks for Chinese Mandarin, Korean, or Arabic). Preparing students to reach this level in this period of time causes many challenges, a major one being the amount of information that needs to be conveyed quickly (e.g., grammar structures, a considerable amount of vocabulary, cultural information, military-related topics). Teaching in the target language can slow the pace of instruction, given that students need extra time to process the information when the target language is used. Both students and teachers can feel anxious about a slower pace of instruction, concerned about potentially not covering all required material prior to unit tests or the DLPT/OPI.

Teachers and students must also keep in mind the realities imposed by students' cognitive load limitations. Cognitive load reminds us that students will need extra time to learn a language given that they must process information in their limited-duration working memory first, before they can transfer it to their long-term memory. The implication of cognitive load learning theory is that "instruction needs to be organised in a manner that reduces unnecessary working memory load," meaning that teachers will need to be very clear with instructions and principles, ensure that they use language that is at their students' level, and ensure that the information they convey to students is not beyond what they can process with their working memory limits (Sweller, 2017). The pace of a course and the amount of material covered and expected to be remembered by the student each day are thus crucial considerations and potential challenges.

Other possible challenges to target language use can be university policies that are inconsistent or unclear, examinations that do not encourage or require the target language, or the realities of classes that prove to be particularly challenging for an instructor (Chambers, 2013). Another challenge to the use of target language in the classroom can be teacher perceptions of the degree to which it is needed or even useful for language instruction; this perception can be directly or indirectly passed on to the students (Rust & Nel, 2024).

Possibilities in Teaching in the Target Language

While time constraints and other challenges undoubtedly exist in this environment, teachers and researchers have agreed for some time that language instructors "should aim to make maximum use of the target language" in their classes (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002, p. 211). This is not to say that the students' native language should never be used (Hall & Cook, 2012); decisions about which language to use for instruction and when to use either one of them, however, should be made based on the learning context and goals in an effort to ensure that instruction is maximally effective. In line with these realities, ACTFL's official policy statement recommends that "learning take place through the target language for 90% or more of classroom time" so that the students can be immersed in the TL "unless there is a specific reason to NOT use the target language" (actfl.org). While this policy statement provides a certain amount of general guidance, it also relies upon the expertise of teachers to determine how to use the target language effectively 90% of the time and what reasons are considered valid for when to use the native language instead. These determinations can be quite challenging.

While focusing on the TL is necessary, all agree that use of learners' native language is not disallowed; there are circumstances when it is appropriate and pedagogically useful, such as (a) for immediate classroom management; (b) to address an immediate and quick learning need that would be too complicated in the TL; (c) during the initial days of class until the TL is more understood (Littlewood & Yu, 2011); or (d) if there is any type of emergency. Further complicating the situation is the reality that simply exposing students to the TL isn't sufficient; use of the TL for teaching needs to be strategic and done effectively (Ellis, 1994).

Many factors can maximize the use of the TL in class. Some of them include the teacher's own determination and confidence, teachers having a TL communication strategy in place, and

teachers starting with more simple TL vocabulary and structures and moving to more complicated TL as students progress (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Teachers are more likely to meet the needs of their students and develop effective target language use policies for their classes when they adopt language approaches that are responsive to student needs (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). Also important is for students to be encouraged to take risks and build their confidence and comfort with speaking and learning in the TL and for them to feel engaged with course content and with the TL use; they can build a sense of pride in their learning and use of the TL in class (Chambers, 1991).

It is therefore clear from the literature that using the target language in teaching and learning is crucial for student success, while at the same time some use of the native language is also acceptable. What teachers need to navigate is this: In their own contexts and within their institution, how can they use the TL effectively so that both teachers and students use the language for maximum learning? That is ultimately what this study set out to investigate, within the context of the fast-paced courses of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do faculty and students perceive that their communication with students meets the expectations of the Target Language Use Command Policy #21?
2. What do faculty and students see as the challenges to implementing the Target Language Use Command Policy #21?
3. What Target Language Use best practices can be identified to disseminate across DLIFLC?

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Context

This research was conducted at the request of DLIFLC leadership and took place at the Presidio of Monterey with UGE Basic Program courses in Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Persian Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. All DLIFLC and Department of Defense protocols were followed (including gaining proper permissions and documentation within the Provost Organization and UGE leadership, the DLIFLC Human Protections Program, and the Army Records Management Directorate Research Office for survey approval) and spanned the timeframe from February to August of 2024, approximately one and a half years after the policy was originally issued.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection consisted of the following quantitative and qualitative methods:

1. *End of Program Student Questionnaire (ESQ) Ratings for Relevant Questions*
   Composite reports of Teaching Effectiveness-based ESQs from Fiscal Year 23 and Fiscal Year 24 Quarter 1 were reviewed. A total of 6,631 students completed the ESQs from the six

languages involved in this research. In addition to open comments, the ratings (scale: 1–4) for the four questions were reviewed for this analysis. See Table 1 for the questions that were reviewed. Averages for the key questions were calculated, and responses to the open-ended questions were used for thematic analysis.

2. *Classroom Observations*
   A checklist was used by two researchers to guide data collection for each classroom observation. Focus areas included the amount of time teachers and students used the target language during class, as well as strategies utilized by the teacher to maximize target language. After the class was over, researchers also asked students the degree to which the target language usage was typical for this instructor for most days. (See Appendix for the observation checklist.) Observations were conducted across all semesters for each language studied, with the information that was gathered used for thematic analysis.

3. *Student Survey*
   Students studying the six languages were invited to respond to the following survey questions (survey approval #ISES-RMZ-24-106 by Army Records Management Directorate). The voluntary survey directions included a brief explanation of the survey purpose, some copied text from Command Policy #21, a link to the policy, a request for their semester and language, a question if they have reviewed the policy before, and four Likert-scale questions (scale: 1–5) about policy implementation. See Table 3 for the specific questions. They were also invited to answer two open-ended questions: (a) Challenges to maximizing target language use in language school facilities, and (b) Suggestions for maximizing targe language use in language school facilities. Averages for the questions were calculated, and responses to the open-ended questions were used for thematic analysis.

4. *Faculty Survey*
   Faculty from the six languages in this project were sent an anonymous, voluntary online survey to complete. Questions were similar to those on the student survey. See Table 4 for the four Likert-scale questions. They were also invited to answer three open-ended questions: (a) Challenges to maximizing target language use in language school facilities, (b) Suggestions for maximizing target language use in language school facilities, and (c) Final comments. Averages for the questions were calculated, and responses to the open-ended questions were used for thematic analysis.

5. *Interviews with Deans and Chairs*
   Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five UGE deans and a semi-structured focus group of 10 chairs was conducted, with all UGE schools represented by a department chair. Responses to each interview were summarized, triangulated with other data, and used for thematic analysis. See the Appendix for the interview questions.

The process for data collection and analysis was iterative, with the ESQ ratings used to inform the student survey questions and faculty survey questions. Interview questions were based on the information gathered from the surveys and observations. The data were coded into themes,

guided by the research questions and following the two-cycle coding system put forward by Miles et al. (2014). During the first coding cycle, provisional codes were identified, largely based on a review of the literature, and during the second cycle, patterns were coded into final themes. Following are the findings, grouped by instrument and then themes gathered from interviews, observations, and open-ended comments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings reveal that in general, students and faculty report that Command Policy #21 on Target Language Use is being followed and enforced. However, opportunities exist to maximize the effectiveness of using the Target Language inside and outside the classroom. For example, while faculty and students self-report that they and their peers are following the policy, classroom observations demonstrate opportunities for refinement, including further support for students to use the target language and not English. These results also identify best practices utilized by teachers in both using the target language effectively and also in ensuring that students use it during class as well. An analysis of the data collected follows.

Final Course Evaluation Ratings, Teacher Effectiveness

The ESQ ratings of students in the six focus languages reveal that, overall, students perceived that the target language was being used in classes, that English was used effectively when it was needed, and that teachers could tell if the student didn't understand something. See Table 1 for overall averages of student responses.

Table 1
ESQ Ratings by Students in Six Focus Languages for FY23 and First Quarter of FY24 (N=6,631)

	FY23/FY24Q1 out of 4.00
My teachers ensured that the target language was the primary language in the classroom.	3.73
My teachers used the target language effectively	3.80
My teachers used English effectively when English was needed	3.74
My teachers could tell if I did not understand something	3.68

Note. 1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree

Classroom Observations

In most of the classes observed, the teacher used the Target Language at least 80% of the class time (see Table 2). For the classes that used the TL less often, they were either Semester I classes or the topic was one that could be considered as warranting more English use (e.g., grammar instruction). It should be noted, however, that not all grammar classes were taught in the TL; in

one observed course for lower-proficiency students in Semester I, the entire class was conducted in the TL. Students appeared to understand the class, based on their ability to answer questions and follow directions for skits, activities, etc. After-class questions to the student confirmed their understanding and their appreciation for being taught grammar in the TL.

The students' use of the Target Language in the observed classes showed more variation, with students speaking English less often than the teachers. The classes with less TL use spanned semesters and class topics. These findings represent an opportunity for further exploration in terms of strategies that teachers can use to maximize students' TL use when they speak to the teacher or peers during class time. The teacher's behavior and use of the target language in class often influenced students' behavior. For example, in some classes, when students became confused about what the teacher said in the TL, they asked the teacher, who rephrased the statement in different ways still in the TL until the student understood (demonstrated by their body language and answering questions correctly); in other classes, in the same situation where students became confused, the confused student asked a peer in English to explain and the teacher did not attempt to support in the TL. Another example involves classroom phrases: in some classes, teachers had clearly taught students how to use key TL phrases to request clarification, ask for support, etc., while in others, students used English in these situations and the teachers did not re-direct them to the TL. These findings represent an area for future research and professional development.

Table 2
Target Language Use by Teachers and Students in Observed Classes (N=20)

	0-49%	50-79%	80%+
What percent of class time teacher used the TL when it was possible/would be expected	2 classes	2 classes	18 classes
How often students responded to TL questions from the teacher in TL	3 classes	5 classes	12 classes
How often students asked questions or initiated conversations with teacher or peers in TL	4 classes	9 classes	7 classes

Observations also recorded strategies utilized by teachers to encourage TL use. Data collection indicated a range across teachers in the frequency these strategies were used; while some used them frequently and consistently during the class observed, other teachers engaged in fewer of them. In some cases, this was due to the proficiency level of the students and their apparent need for TL support; in other cases, students would have benefited from more use of these strategies. It was also found that some teachers were hesitant to engage much at all with struggling students in the TL, simply not asking them any questions.

Observed strategies utilized by teachers to maximize the use of the TL in class included: (a) using circumlocution and code switching to allow a student to quickly understand the meaning of a

word/concept and then moving back to the TL; (b) allowing students to have sufficient processing time before they were required to produce in the TL; (c) correcting student errors when using the TL in an effective manner, e.g., knowing when to focus on comprehensibility and fluency vs. accuracy in their answers or speaking; (d) utilizing peer support, e.g., by inviting students to re-state a peer's English statement with one in the TL; and (e) creating interactive tasks in class such as role playing or improvised skits.

Observed strategies used by teachers to help students apparently having difficulty following the rest of the class when the TL is being used as the main language included: (a) closely monitoring student behavior and communication for signs of student confusion; (b) encouraging students to use the TL in any way they can and to take sufficient time; (c) adjusting their use of the TL to match student proficiency on an as-needed basis; (d) providing hints or support for students struggling to use the TL; and (e) using visuals or writing on the board/screen to support students.

Use of these strategies is in line with cognitive load learning theory, in that students are given sufficient time to process what they hear in the TL and then to respond, and that the TL is at the students' proficiency level (Sweller, 2017). More research is needed into how these practices can be spread across all teachers and used more consistently, particularly for how teachers can help students speak in the TL language more often and more confidently.

Student Survey Responses

A total of 222 students in the six languages completed the voluntary online survey (Arabic=9; Chinese Mandarin=105; Korean=39; Persian Farsi=1; Russian=45; Spanish=18; Unknown Language=5). Of the 222 students, 78 reported being in Semester I, 85 in Semester II, and 59 in Semester III. One hundred and twenty-eight (128) of the respondents reported having reviewed the policy before taking this survey; 37 reported that they read it when they took the survey but didn't remember seeing it before; and 57 reported having heard about it but never having looked at it. These numbers reveal an opportunity for ongoing reinforcement of the policy for all students across the length of the program.

As can be seen in Table 3, students overall report that the TL Policy is being enforced (M=4.16/5.0) and that teachers use the TL appropriately (M=4.39/5.0). Students reported feeling less confident in the TL use of their peers (M=3.86/5.0) or themselves (M=3.98/5.0). These results are consistent with class observations and represent areas of opportunity for teacher training and implementation across UGE.

Table 3

Student Survey Responses (N=222) Regarding Target Language Use by Self and Others

	Mean	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
This policy is enforced by our teaching team	4.16	2.2%	4.5%	10.7%	40.6%	42%
Use of the TL by our teachers in class meets the expectations of the Command Policy	4.39	2.2%	2.7%	6.3%	32.1%	56.7%
Use of the TL by my classmates in class meets the expectation of the Command Policy	3.86	4.0%	9.4%	12.5%	45.1%	29%
My use of the TL in class meets policy expectations	3.98	2.7%	8.0%	11.6%	44.2%	33.5%

Note. 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

It is not clear why students are using the TL less in class. One possibility is that teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of students' TL use could be impacting their willingness to try; that is, students may decide not to bother with TL use if a teacher directly or indirectly discloses their opinion that it is not necessary for students to use the TL in class or that they do not have the time for students to try due to the amount of material that needs to be covered. This would be consistent with findings by Rust and Nel (2024) that teacher perceptions impact student TL use. It is also the case that many students lack confidence in their TL use and/or are risk-averse to making mistakes. These are areas that can be supported by teachers and warrant further exploration.

Faculty Survey Responses

A total of 83 faculty completed the survey (Arabic=23; Chinese Mandarin=18; Korean=12; Persian Farsi=15; Russian=7; Spanish=8). In general, these faculty respondents reported that students follow the TL policy less often than faculty. This is consistent with other data sources in this project. Also, overall, faculty reported that they think the policy is enforced and used by their team, students, and themselves (see Table 4). Faculty in some languages (i.e., Chinese Mandarin, Korean, and Spanish), however, expressed concern with implementation of the policy and prevalence of the TL. It could be that between these languages, there are differences in policy enforcement and use of the TL, or it is possible that respondents in some language programs answered this anonymous survey more honestly with their opinions than did others. More exploration into the possibility of actual program differences is warranted, extending beyond anonymous surveys into a more comprehensive analysis, for example utilizing ongoing unannounced classroom observations or interviews with students with targeted questions about how and when the target language is used. The potential role of realities external to teachers (e.g., how the curriculum is structured and the amount of English in the textbooks) could also be explored.

Table 4

Faculty Survey Responses (N=83) Regarding Target Language Use by Self and Others

	Total	Arabic	Chinese Mandarin	Korean	Persian Farsi	Russian	Spanish
This policy is enforced by my school/department	4.06	4.30	3.72	3.92	4.53	4.00	3.50
Use of the target language by our students in class meets policy expectations	3.69	3.91	3.44	3.25	3.87	4.14	3.50
Use of the target language by my teaching team colleagues meets policy expectations	4.05	4.04	4.06	4.08	4.00	3.71	4.38
My use of the target language in school facilities meets policy expectations	4.19	4.09	4.50	4.00	4.40	3.71	4.13

Note. 1=Strongly Agree to 5=Strongly Disagree

Challenges to Students Using the Target Language

An analysis of the survey responses, observations, and interviews revealed the following challenges to students using the TL. These are divided into feedback from students, and then feedback from teachers, chairs, and deans (see Table 5). A careful reading of these points reveals that schools have an opportunity to increase effective TL use and that many of these challenges can be addressed with appropriate attention and planning. Also, it can be seen that some challenges are shared between groups—for example, both students and faculty/supervisors think that time crunches make using the TL challenging, and both perceive a lack of student motivation to be challenging. Both groups also note that students are demotivated or lack confidence to speak the TL. There are many reasons that students may feel frustrated and lack confidence in their speaking, yet observations revealed that not all teachers were taking advantage of all available pedagogies to create environments where students would be most likely to speak the TL. The role of the teacher in student attitudes and willingness to speak the TL is crucial and is one that merits further research. It should also be noted that when asked, no chairs or deans were aware of any student facing a disciplinary action due related to the Target Language Policy. These are also challenges that many teachers across the Institute are successfully addressing on a daily basis in their classrooms.

Table 5
Challenges to Student Use of the TL, as Expressed by Students, Teachers, and Supervisors

---

Feedback from Students:

1. Frustration/lack of confidence
2. Not being able to fully express oneself in TL
3. Insufficient understanding in TL (vocabulary, grammar, etc.), esp. for teaching complex grammar points
4. Insufficient TL to be able to ask questions
5. Lack of motivation or exhaustion on students' part
6. Time it takes to speak in TL, which takes away from class time/content

---

Feedback from Deans, Chairs, Teachers:

1. Lack of training/support for students on how and when to try to use TL
2. Lack of accountability/expressed expectation that students will use the TL
3. Lack of an environment conducive to students using the TL (e.g., risk taking, engaging)
4. Lack of student motivation to speak in TL
5. Perception that speaking in TL is less necessary since OPI graduation requirement requires only 1+
6. The DLPT requires English, and many curricula require English
7. Lack of teacher commitment to and enforcement of TL policy
8. Ineffective time management and classroom management by teachers

---

Also noteworthy in this table is the perception by some teachers and supervisors that there is a lack of a serious enough commitment to and belief in the TL policy by some teachers. One comment from the faculty survey illustrates this reality: "If the teachers are speaking English in the classrooms, one cannot enforce that on the students." Also, teachers and supervisors commented on ineffective time management by teachers potentially impacting teachers' ability to teach in the TL. As noted from the faculty survey, "While it's easier to convey ideas in English, with added time and care the use of the TL would bring more benefits to the students." One Semester I student noted in their survey the importance of some English between peers: "Students do use English a lot during breaks in between class, but I think that's actually good since it fosters a more tight-knit classroom environment." This perspective of the role of authentic communication in classroom dynamics is one to keep in mind as well. A general reluctance about enforcing the TL policy with students is also noted, with all supervisors interviewed having no recollection of any student being held accountable (e.g., with a disciplinary counseling) for not speaking the TL in school facilities.

Challenges to Teachers Using the Target Language Effectively

An analysis of the survey responses, observations, and interviews revealed various challenges to teachers using the TL effectively (see Table 6). A careful reading of these points reveals the

opportunity for there to be greater buy-in regarding the use of the Target Language in Basic courses, in addition to developing a shared understanding of some of the specifics regarding the policy, such as that the Target Language is not required 100% of the time. The role of English being used inside the curriculum was brought up several times by respondents across all levels, meaning it must also be used in class. Also, the role played by a teacher's English proficiency is interesting to consider, and how that dynamic can impact language use in the classroom. For example, teachers who are strong in English may be reluctant to speak as much of the TL since they can convey much more information in English within the same period of time; at the same time, teachers with lower English proficiency may find themselves less able to determine which language to use under which circumstances and how. They may try to codeswitch but find that they cannot switch easily between the two languages and become mired in trying to explain a complicated concept in English and yet unsure of how to explain the same complicated concept effectively in the TL.

Table 6
Challenges to Teachers' Effective Use of the TL, as Expressed by Teachers, Chairs, and Deans

---

Feedback from Deans, Chairs, Teachers:

1. Teacher has high proficiency in English
2. Teacher has lower proficiency in English
3. Incorrect understanding of policy requirements—e.g., TL isn't *always* required
4. Perception that teaching in the TL is unnecessary for students' language acquisition
5. Perception that speaking in TL is less necessary since OPI requirement is only 1+
6. Lack of accountability for teaching in English when not necessary
7. Requirement of some English in class due to the DLPT and heavy-English curricula
8. Insufficient experience/training in TL use:
   - Tailoring TL to student's level, teaching all skills (including grammar) in TL
9. Time it takes to speak in TL, which takes away from class time/content

---

Taken together, the data from this study provides a comprehensive and nuanced view of the implementation of Command Policy #21 on Target Language Use, on strategies and conditions that maximize the potential for the Target Language to be used effectively, and on training and professional development opportunities. These implications are discussed in the following section.

Pedagogical Implications and Training Opportunities

The study shows that faculty and students in the studied UGE Basic Program languages are generally aware of the Command Policy on Target Language Use (the Policy hereafter) and have made noticeable efforts to promote target language use in all school facilities. The study also identifies several challenging areas that require attention from all stakeholders. In this section

we review five main challenging areas and discuss their possible administrative and academic implications, particularly future faculty professional development.

Challenge #1: Better Communication of Expectations

The Policy requires that students adhere to TL use while inside school facilities. It also reminds teachers that TL use is part of the standards in their performance elements. But there was a general reluctance to implement the policy through disciplinary enforcement, as is stated explicitly in the policy. According to the findings in this study, no disciplinary actions have ever been taken against any student or faculty member to enforce the policy although non-compliance was by no means a rare occurrence. One possible reason is that faculty or students didn't know what constituted non-compliance, what exactly they were held accountable for, and what exactly would be the consequences. The Policy states, "All students and teachers will ensure they do not engage in English conversation unless identified as necessary by a staff or faculty member." This statement basically allows individual staff or faculty members to decide when they should use the TL and when they can use English. Schools therefore have an opportunity to provide specific guidance and training to supervisors, teachers, and students on the most likely scenarios that warrant the use of English, and typical circumstances where the target language has to be used as the dominant language. There should be clear communication of expectations for all stakeholders regarding their accountability and the consequences of failed accountability.

Challenge #2: Understanding the Importance of Speaking

Feedback from students, teachers, and program managers points to a noticeable lack of internal motivation among students and teachers to seek opportunities to speak the TL. One factor that negatively impacts motivation is the perception that the graduation requirement for speaking (Level 1+ on the OPI) can be reached without continuous and extensive practice through all three semesters, and the push to maximize TL use may take time and resources away from reading and listening. This perception seems to be supported by the fact that when students are not able to pass DLPT/OPI graduation requirements, it is almost always because they cannot pass the listening or reading portions, not because of their speaking score. This perception reflects and probably in turn affects the way speaking is taught, assessed, and thus valued.

Underappreciation of the importance of speaking is also due to a lack of understanding of the interconnectedness between speaking and other skill modalities and especially between speaking and listening. Extensive research in second language acquisition shows that speaking, in addition to being an important skill modality, helps learners improve fluency and accuracy, retain knowledge and skills, and facilitate the understanding of nuanced aspects of the language through the mental processes typically connected with language production (Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). The faculty at DLIFLC are generally aware of the importance of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) but there is much less familiarity with the essential role of comprehensible output or language production in second language acquisition. Successful implementation of the Policy needs buy-in by faculty and students, which is more likely to happen when faculty and students recognize the benefits of language production to language acquisition in general and

development of listening skills in particular. A better understanding of the role of comprehensible output may also positively impact the way different skills are integrated in teaching and curriculum development.

Challenge #3: Effective Use of Target Language

When promoting maximal TL use, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of effectiveness. The TL is used effectively when it facilitates a student's learning process. All would agree that no amount of TL input will help students learn if it is not comprehensible to them. To ensure their TL use is comprehensible to students, teachers must tailor their language to the approximate level of their students' TL proficiency. They can also use appropriate communication strategies such as circumlocution, code-switching, and non-verbal strategies to make the input more comprehensible to the students. Successful adaptation of the TL to students' proficiency is a continuous, dynamic process during which teachers need to assess individual students' comprehension continuously and adjust their own language use accordingly. It requires teachers to have the linguistic skills and a strategic mindset, especially when there are considerable proficiency gaps among the students in the same class.

Comprehension of TL input is not solely determined by the linguistic properties of the input; comprehension is also affected by the listener's effort and motivation. How teachers conduct a class in the medium of TL impacts students' motivation to use the TL. In some classes observed, the teachers kept students actively engaged in using the TL receptively and productively by continuously interacting with them collectively and individually. In the process, these teachers constantly assessed students' comprehension, provided instant feedback and assistance, and adjusted their own language as needed. The personal attention from the teachers facilitated students' learning. The students not only listened more attentively but also spoke more in the TL. Best practices such as these should be identified, validated, disseminated, and integrated into faculty training in a way that is consistent and ongoing.

Finally, another factor teachers should consider when deciding how much of the TL should be used and how it should be used is the learning objectives of a lesson. For example, for a first semester grammar lesson on complicated grammatical rules, the teachers may want to use more English to make sure that students have an exact understanding of the nuances of these grammatical rules so that they will be able to apply these rules correctly by the end of the lesson. On the other hand, they may want to use the TL as the dominant language if the students are not expected to accurately understand all the details of the message or are even encouraged to guess the meaning from context.

Challenge #4: Encouraging Students to Take Risks Using TL

Apprehension of making mistakes is a major reason for students to avoid speaking the TL. A learning environment that encourages students to speak the TL without being afraid of making mistakes is typically associated with the following characteristics:

- First, all students feel respected and included, regardless of their language proficiency. The opinions and feedback from all students are valued by teachers in planning and executing learning activities, and their individual academic and emotional needs are attended to. Students' buy-in likely leads to more active participation in these class activities.
- Second, teachers and students share the belief that making mistakes is part of learning a language and constructive feedback provides opportunities for growth. The challenge for teachers is to deliver potentially critical messages tactfully to minimize possible anxiety or even resistance from students. Poor delivery of the message can distract students from the message and encourage avoidance behavior.
- Third, teachers maximize opportunities for all students to do what they *can* do in the TL rather than focus on what they *can't* do. Affirming what students have accomplished and providing verbal or non-verbal cues to help students produce more TL can help students reinforce and expand what they have learned and help them build confidence in using the TL. On the other hand, interrupting students constantly to correct every mistake they make or simply completing the sentence that students are struggling with reduces their opportunities and motivation to speak the TL.

Challenge #5: Creating a Linguistically and Culturally Rich Environment

Just as organizers of immersion activities use cultural realia to simulate an environment in a target language speaking community, all language programs can use cultural realia to create a more authentic and meaningful learning environment in all school facilities. The visual images of cultural realia can be a source of stimulation for formal and informal learning such as an improvised conversation on a cultural topic and recall of words and expression students have learned.

The findings from this study and these pedagogical implications highlight the importance of teachers. Language teachers play a key role in creating a linguistically rich environment. By speaking the TL in and out class and by insisting that their students do so as well, they serve as a valuable source of comprehensible input to students and help students grow comfortable using the TL for communication. More importantly, they set a convincing example for their students to follow in the implementation of the TL Policy.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

No research study is without limitations. In this study, the interpretation of the results must take into account the reality of response bias, whether that be in students' ESQ final course ratings, the student surveys for their current classes, or faculty responses in the survey of teacher perceptions of how well this policy was being implemented. Students or teachers may feel pressured to respond with answers that are socially acceptable and not feel they could express their true feelings. At the same time, classroom observations may have been impacted by the presence of observers, where teachers and students were putting forward their best

performance for those who were taking notes. Given these limitations, further exploration and ongoing analysis into these topics is warranted, where teachers and students become more accustomed to regular observations and are less likely to change their behavior based on having an observer present. Doing an in-depth analysis into the effectiveness of the target language that was being used was beyond the scope of this project and therefore warrants further research so that best practices can be identified, detailed, and shared across the Institute. Future studies can explore strategies that teachers can use to maximize students' TL use, as well as how to use the TL effectively during class time for all subjects (i.e., including grammar) in a way that maximizes student understanding within the realities of cognitive load demands.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights a key accomplishment at DLIFLC: teachers and students alike report that the Command Policy #21 on Target Language Use is largely being followed in terms of speaking the target language in school facilities. At the same time, the study identifies challenges faced by students and teachers and therefore some training opportunities. For one, there is a lack of clarity on when the use of English is appropriate in the classroom. But perhaps more importantly, this research points to the need for teachers to have an in-depth understanding of how to use the target language in level-appropriate ways according to students' proficiency levels. The target language a teacher uses in a Semester I class, for example, should (a) use simple grammatical forms, (b) be spoken with vocabulary the students are familiar with, and (c) spoken at a rate that is sufficiently slow and understandable for the students. As students grow in their proficiency level, the teacher's language use can simultaneously increase in complexity. This presents a clear training opportunity across Basic program courses.

A second challenging area is students' motivation and willingness to speak the TL in class. This provides a training opportunity for teachers to be more informed of how to raise students' awareness of the importance of them taking risks in class and trying to use the TL whenever possible. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that the classroom environment encourages and supports TL use; teachers can also help students understand ways they can use the TL even though they are at a beginning level (e.g., times they can try to use it, useful vocabulary, etc.). As teachers and students alike grow in their comfort to teach and learn in the target language, teaching in the TL will become more of a way of life at DLIFLC, and less of a policy to be followed.

REFERENCES

Brevik, L. M., & Rindal, U. (2020). Language use in the classroom: Balancing target language exposure with the need for other languages. *TESOL Quarterly, 54*(4), 925–953. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.564

Chambers, F. (1991). Promoting use of the target language in the classroom. *Language Learning Journal*, 4. 27–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571739185200411

Chambers, G. N. (2013). The target language revisited. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 36*, 44–54. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.07.003

Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

Hall, G., & Cook, G. (2012). Own-language use in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching, 45*(3), 271–308. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000067

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

Littlewood, W., & Yu, B. (2011). First language and target language in the foreign language classroom. *Language Teaching, 44*(1), 64–77. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444809990310

Miles, M., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Rust, M., & Nel, J. (2024). The helpfulness of code-switching in teaching Afrikaans as a first additional language. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, 42*(2), 276–294. https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2023.2244014

Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input and second language acquisition* (pp. 235–253). Newbury House.

Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (1995). Problems in output and the cognitive processes they generate: A step towards second language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 16*, 371–391. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/16.3.371

Sweller, J. (2017). Cognitive load theory and teaching English as a second language to adult learners. *TESL Ontario Contact Magazine*, 5–10. https://contact.teslontario.org/

Turnbull, M., & Arnett, K. (2002). Teachers' uses of the target and first languages in second and foreign language classrooms. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 22*, 204–218. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190502000119