



THE SIOP MODEL AS AN EMPOWERING TEACHING METHOD FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS - A STUDY CASE

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Abstract:

The increase in the needs of the English language learners (ELLs) and their endless demands in terms of achievement and proficiency in all the educational systems all over the world urged teachers and educators to call for new teaching strategies that sound more adequate and appropriate in the classroom. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model emerged as one of the worldwide prominent teaching methods that guarantee the ELLs success, especially when it has to do with the understanding of the content and language learning meanwhile. With its diverse culture and prominent engagement in terms of education, Morocco represents a fertile field for the implementation of the SIOP Model that has proven in different contexts its adequacy in helping ELLs achieve proficiency. This study is about a quasi-experimental research that is implemented in an urban school known for its diversification in terms of mother tongue, socio-economic status, gender, and background. Given these different circumstances of the learners, the findings reported after the adoption of the SIOP Model as a teaching approach showed that it is a reliable and adequate teaching method in terms of content and language proficiency. The use of wh-questions as key indicators to measure the learners' capacity of understanding and responding correctly throughout the experiment phase showed the superiority of the ELLs in the SIOP classes in contrast to the learners in the mainstream classes. This superiority is embodied, especially in terms of the high scores obtained in providing correct answers in a short duration of time.

Keywords: The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model, English language learners (ELLs), English language proficiency (ELP), mainstream class, SIOP class

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1. Introduction

The fact of satisfying the English language learners' (ELLs) educational needs has become a priority for all educational systems worldwide. It is mainly due to the difficulties that these learners find in learning content when they do not speak the language used in teaching. In fact, different models and programs have been adopted in order to develop the learners' achievement and proficiency in both content and language. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model emerged as one of the professional development approaches that can solve the problem of English language proficiency among ELLs. *"It is an approach for integrating language and content instruction in either content areas or language development classes"* (Short, Echevarria, and Richards-Tutor, 2011, p. 364). The effectiveness of the SIOP Model, especially in content areas, is foreshadowed in the fact that it teaches *"content curriculum to students learning through a new language. Teachers employ techniques that make the content concepts accessible and develop students' skills in the new language"* (Short, Fidelman, and Louguit, 2012, p. 334).

Hence, the authors' main focus in this approach is on the proficiency of the English language learners' content and academic language learning where the ELLs will be able to progress academically and at the same time develop their English language proficiency in a good way. This method is in fact organized around eight main components and thirty well detailed and helpful features that provide a clear cut and to the point framework for instruction. So, we have, 1. Lesson Preparation with six features, 2. Building Background with three features, 3. Comprehensive Input with three features, 4. Strategies with three features, 5. Interaction with four features, 6. Practice and Application with three features, 7. Lesson Delivery with four features, and 8. Review and Assessment with four features (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, 2004). These components and features provide very helpful and concrete resources, and practical strategies for teachers and describe when and how to use them in the classroom, especially while designing their lesson plans. In fact, each detail is of great significance, starting from the inclusion of the content and language objectives that should be stated at the very beginning of each lesson and should be checked by the end of each lesson by taking students' backgrounds and experiences into consideration, to the integration of all the four linguistic domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), as well as the assessment of the students' learning as a critical issue for the English language learners.

This study is a report of an experimental research that aims at finding the best and practical teaching strategies that may help ELLs develop their English language proficiency (ELP) after the implementation of the SIOP Model in the process of teaching in contrast with a mainstream class. The evaluation of this model is conducted through teaching wh-questions, which is a comparative thing. It is dealt with through two comparative backgrounds (SIOP classes and Mainstream classes) where some learners find it so difficult to learn than others do. This complexity in terms of language learning comes from the non-linearity of these forms.

The research is conducted in an urban middle school. The participants are divided into two equal groups of ten students each. The choice of the learners has taken into account different criteria such as their mother tongue, gender, English level, and background. In fact, the hypothesis of the study revolves around the idea that the implementation of the SIOP Model in an English class has always proven to be a powerful contribution to the ELLs proficiency in terms of content and language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. How Long Does It Take English Language Learners to Attain Proficiency?

a. What do we mean by “ELLs?”

According to Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2010), English language learners (ELLs) are students who are learning English as a second or additional language.

b. What do we mean by “English Language Proficiency” (ELP)?

English Language Proficiency (ELP) is the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing their program of study (USQ, 2016).

c. Types of English Language Proficiency

According to Collier (1995), there are two types of English Language proficiency:

- 1) Oral English proficiency (That is acquired in a short time), and
- 2) Academic English Proficiency / Fluency (That is acquired in a long period of time).

According to Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000), there are different factors that may speed up or slow down the ELLs capacity of acquiring a new language. Among these factors, we can mention the amount of exposure the learners have to English language, the level of parental help at home, and the impact of their environments.

However, the research conducted by these authors shows that the Oral English Proficiency (OEP) can take from three to five years to develop. On the other hand, the Academic English Proficiency (AEP) can take from four to seven years to develop, (Hakuta, Butler, and Witt, 2000).

Thus, the impact of the language proficiency may differ from one student to another depending on the kind of the content areas studied and the skills in which they are supposed to be successful in the classroom, given that the four language domains (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) are correlated in an “*attempt to show both divergent and convergent connections between the various facets of English language proficiency*” (Withycombe, 2014, p. 60). Actually, while some ELLs perform well, others find themselves struggling to keep up with their classmates in order to learn the same thing, in the same place. “*For some learners, English may not just be a second language, but a third or more*” (Withycombe, 2014, p. 59), which is regarded as a kind of a limited language ability and, of course, this is going to be considered as an obstacle that is going to hinder the learners’ acquisition of the English language.

d. Does it really take four to seven years to learn English?

In one of her recent articles, Jana Echevarria tried to answer this question by stating that the ELLs can attain Academic English Proficiency in fewer than 4 - 7 years. She also added that *"We don't know how many of our students have the potential to reach proficiency more rapidly than the upper range of 4 - 7 years but we should have the expectation that all students may be able to, and commit to excellent teaching to get them there"* (Echevarria, 2018, p.2).

However, in a world where everything is changing rapidly, it is obvious that any educational system should also be prepared to such important changes which are clearly apparent in our schools and within our classrooms. So, in terms of English language proficiency (ELP) in an ESL / EFL class, it is evident that the most striking challenge that faces teachers, coaches, as well as administrators is to find adequate ways to satisfy the English language learners' needs by helping them learn the English language and achieve academically in an equal and comprehensible way regardless of their background, English level, mother tongue, social and economic standing, gender, culture, and origin. This process seems to be out of reach due to the fact that teachers are not well prepared to confront this important issue. Hence, and in order to overcome this ambiguity and confusion, teachers should adopt clear ideas about the methods or strategies they have to undergo in order to deal with this educational problem in their classrooms.

Hence, different teaching approaches and strategies are applied by mainstream teachers to help them boost their professional development in teaching English language learners. As a matter of fact, this literature review is represented as a kind of platform that helps to expose an overview of the best practices related to the teaching of the English language learners and their actual states in our schools through the exploration of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model. This protocol is considered as one of the effective and reliable professional development programs that have a successful impact in training teachers to teach English language learners not only in the United States but in different countries all over the world (Short and Echevarria, 1999; Vogt, Echevarria, and Short, 2010).

2.2. English Language Learners (ELLs) Proficiency

According to Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004, 2007, and 2014), the ELLs are students who are learning English as a second or additional language. Hence, variety of factors influence their academic achievement and performance. The learners may be able to speak the language they are exposed to, but their knowledge of this language is still restricted. It is mainly because of the obstacles they encounter during the teaching and learning process. It is a fact that hinders the capacity of their performance due to their modest and limited level of the English language in terms of proficiency and performance. It is then a long way to go for the ELLs to attain proficiency, especially when it comes to the study of content areas such as English Language Art (ELA), Social Studies (SS), Mathematics, Science, etc.

As a matter of fact, different scales may be adopted in order to measure the ELLs proficiency. Through these scales or measures, we were able to indicate the different levels of the ELLs and when and how these learners reached the proficiency stage. The categorization of these indicators varies from three to nine levels of proficiency, starting from the beginning stage to the very advanced one. The most common scales that are known world-wide are (1) the Model of Performance Indicators (MPIs), (2) the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), (3) the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT), (4) the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL), (5) the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), and (6) the Assessment Comprehension & Communication in English State to State for ELLs (ACCESS).

2.3. Characteristics of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model

According to Echevarria, and Vogt (2008; 2010), the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model is *“an approach for teaching content to English learners in strategic ways that make subject matter concepts comprehensible while promoting the students’ English language development”* (p.5). Hence, the authors’ main focus in this approach is on the proficiency of the English language learners’ content and academic language learning where the English language learners will be able to progress academically and at the same time develop their English language proficiently in a good way.

The method is based on different components and features as a helpful and instructional framework for teachers to use in the classroom, especially while designing their lesson plans. In fact, each detail is of great significance, starting from the inclusion of the content and language objectives that should be stated at the very beginning of each lesson in oral and written forms and should be checked by the end of each lesson by taking students’ backgrounds and experiences into consideration, to the integration of all the four linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) that should be practiced through the use of different adequate and ample strategies, as well as the review and assessment of the students’ learning as a critical issue for the English language learners.

2.4. Implication of the SIOP Model

While struggling to find the best approach to adopt in order to teach and support the English language learners, the SIOP Model provides teachers with ample models to deliver and implement lessons in an anxiety-free atmosphere where every student is enjoying the class activities. In the SIOP classes, nothing is left for improvisation or done at random. Every single thing is there for a clear and specific purpose. Through this protocol, teachers could plan, implement, and observe good quality lessons built mainly on the students’ different ways of learning and cultural differences in order to meet their needs and interests in terms of their English language proficiency hand in hand with their proficiency of core subjects such as social studies, mathematics, and science.

In fact, the SIOP Model appeared as an educational approach in order to narrow the gaps between native English speaking students (or second language learners or what

is called minority language speakers) in terms of their proficiency and achievement of the English language. Its main goal is to achieve high academic standards of all the English language learners.

Actually, the first appearance of the SIOP Model was in the United States as a salvation method, which tried to put an end to the different interventions adopted by the educational system in this country in order to address the English language learner's performance gap, mainly among the immigrant or minority communities (Asians, Hispanics, African-American learners, Arabs, Europeans, etc.). Among these interventions we can mention the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 and the Response to Intervention (RtI) method (Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012; Echevarria, & Hasbrouck, 2009). As a matter of fact, it is recommended to state that *"one of the most important things that teachers can remember when embarking on SIOP Model implementation in their own classrooms is that it is not about changing everything you do, [it] is about refining your current teaching to meet the needs of your English language students"* (Vogt, Echevarria, & Short, 2010, p.p. 30-31).

So, the SIOP Model's effect on the English learners' performance and achievement at school was measured by using a quasi-experimental design such as the Illinois Measurement of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE) which was used to measure the reading and writing skills of the English language learners in grades three and higher. This process proved its reliability based on the English language learners' achievements and scores obtained in the tests (Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012). The learners' results may vary depending on whether their teachers have had any trainings in the way the SIOP Model should be used in the teaching domain or not. Therefore, teachers should participate in professional development sessions in order to learn and apply the SIOP model in an adequate way. The implementation may vary from one teacher to another. We can have high, medium, or low implementers. Nevertheless, the level of each teacher's implementation will progress over time *"and therefore differences in student performance could be related to teacher training and implementation of the SIOP Model"* (Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2012, p.348).

It is noteworthy that the implementation of any new approach in the classroom is a big challenge for both teachers and students due to the fact that we are already using heavy programs with very structured curriculum. However, based on the outcomes of all the studies conducted so far, the implementation of the SIOP Model showed a significant improvement in the academic English scores of the ELLs in both content and language learning. It has also an impact on the teachers' performance and their quality of teaching, especially in the content areas such as Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science (Short, Fidelman, and Louguit, 2012; Himmel, Short, Echevarria, & Richards-Tutor, 2012; Echivarria, Short, and Powers, 2006; Echivarria and Short, 2010; 2011).

Through the SIOP model, teachers are encouraged to modify their ways of teaching. At the same time, this method gives broader opportunities for the learners to interact with their classmates and strengthen their use of the English language in both content and language areas.

3. Methodology & Implementation of the SIOP Model

3.1 Background, Setting & Participants

The implementation of the SIOP Model is composed of twenty 9th grade students in an urban middle school. These learners are all beginners. They are divided into two mixed groups of ten learners in each group. The first group is called a mainstream class (MS) and the second group is called the SIOP (or treatment) class.

3.2 Research Design

In this study case, I adopted of a mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology. The study's main focus is on the measurement of the capacity of the ELLs to answer wh-questions on the language being taught in a social studies lesson by using the SIOP Model in the field of teaching. In this case, the language used is English.

4. Analysis of the Results

The findings indicate that the implementation of the SIOP Model in an English class has helped the ELLs achieve academically while developing their English proficiency (see the tables and charts below).

Table 1: The measurement of the English language learners' capacity to understand and answer wh-questions correctly: SIOP Class 1

Wh-question forms	Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Class 1					
	Students' Responses			Duration of the students' responses		
	Number of wh-questions	Correct Answers	False Answers	Less than 2 seconds	3 Seconds	More than 3 seconds
Who	4	4	0	3	1	0
What	6	4	2	1	2	3
How	4	2	2	0	2	2
Where	5	3	2	2	1	2
When	10	8	2	5	3	2
Why	2	1	1	0	1	1
Whom	0	0	0	0	0	0
Which	3	2	1	0	2	1
Totals	34	24	10	11	12	11
Proportion of Progress	100%	70.58%	29.41%	32.35%	35.29%	32.35%

Table 2: The measurement of the English language learners' capacity to understand and answer wh-questions correctly: Mainstream Class 1

Wh-question forms	Mainstream Class (MS) 1					
	Students' Responses			Duration of the students' responses		
	Number of wh-questions	Correct Answers	False Answers	Less than 2 seconds	3 Seconds	More than 3 seconds
Who	4	2	2	1	2	1
What	6	3	3	1	1	4
How	4	0	4	0	0	4
Where	5	2	3	1	1	3
When	10	5	5	2	3	5
Why	2	0	2	0	0	2
Whom	0	0	0	0	0	0
Which	3	0	3	0	0	3
Totals	34	12	22	5	7	22
Proportion of Progress	100%	35.29%	64.70%	14.70%	20.58	67.70%

Table 3: The measurement of the English language learners' capacity to understand and answer wh-questions correctly: SIOP Class 4

Wh-question forms	Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Class 4					
	Students' Responses			Duration of the students' responses		
	Number of wh-questions	Correct Answers	False Answers	Less than 2 seconds	3 Seconds	More than 3 seconds
Who	3	3	0	3	0	0
What	4	3	1	3	1	0
How	3	2	1	2	1	0
Where	4	3	1	2	1	1
When	6	6	0	5	1	0
Why	3	2	1	1	1	1
Whom	2	1	1	0	1	1
Which	2	2	0	1	1	0
Totals	27	22	5	17	7	3
Proportion of Progress	100%	81.40%	18.51%	62.96%	25.92%	11.11%

Table 4: The measurement of the ELLs capacity to understand and answer wh-questions correctly: Mainstream Class 4

Wh-question forms	Mainstream Class 4					
	Students' Responses			Duration of the students' responses		
	Number of wh-questions	Correct Answers	False Answers	Less than 2 seconds	3 Seconds	More than 3 seconds
Who	3	2	1	2	0	1
What	4	2	2	2	1	1
How	3	1	2	0	1	2
Where	4	2	2	0	3	1
When	6	2	4	1	3	2
Why	3	1	2	0	1	2
Whom	2	1	1	0	0	2
Which	2	0	2	0	0	2
Totals	27	11	16	5	9	13
Proportion of Progress	100%	40.74%	59.25%	18.51%	33.33%	48.14%

5. Discussion

5.1. The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol and Mainstream classes: The progression and differences

In the fourth Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) class (table 3), the learners were able to answer 81.40 % of the wh-questions correctly, with a progress of 10.82 % in comparison to the results achieved in the first SIOP class (table 1), which was 70.58%. The proportion of progress from the first mainstream class to the fourth mainstream class did not exceed 5.45 %. It progressed from 35.29% to 40.74%.

5.2. The Duration in Both Classes: (SIOP class and mainstream class)

The learners' answers duration in the two first classes and the two last classes of the experimentation (The SIOP class 1 and the mainstream class 1, and the SIOP class 4 and the mainstream class 4). For example, the learners in the first SIOP class (table 1) were able to answer eleven questions out of the thirty four in less than two seconds, which means 32.35 % of the whole answers. We can also add that 35.29 % of the answers were produced in a duration of three seconds and the remaining answers were done in more than three seconds, with a proportion of progress of 32.35 %. As far as the learners' answers duration in the first mainstream class is concerned (table 2) , we can notice that only 14.70 % of the answers were uttered in less than two seconds, whereas the majority of the answers were done in more than three seconds with 60.70 %.

On the other hand, in the fourth SIOP class (table 3), the learners were able to answer 22 correct answers out of the 27 questions asked for the whole class.

In the fourth mainstream class (table 4), the learners were able to answer only 11 correct answers out of the same number of questions asked for the other class (SIOP class).

We can also notice that the learners in all the SIOP classes made less mistakes than the learners in the mainstream classes. For instance, the learners in the first SIOP class scored only 29.41% false answers (table 1), but the learners in the first mainstream class scored 73.52 % of the false answers (table 2). Therefore, the difference between the two classes is obvious and it goes beyond 44.11 % (see the charts below).

Chart 1: The correct answers of the SIOP class 1

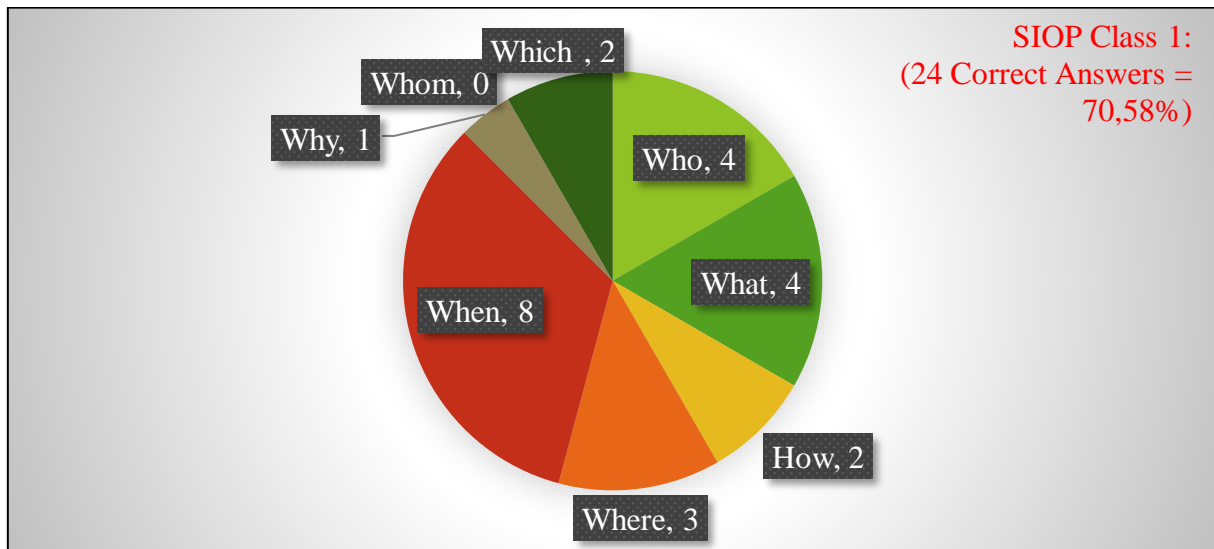
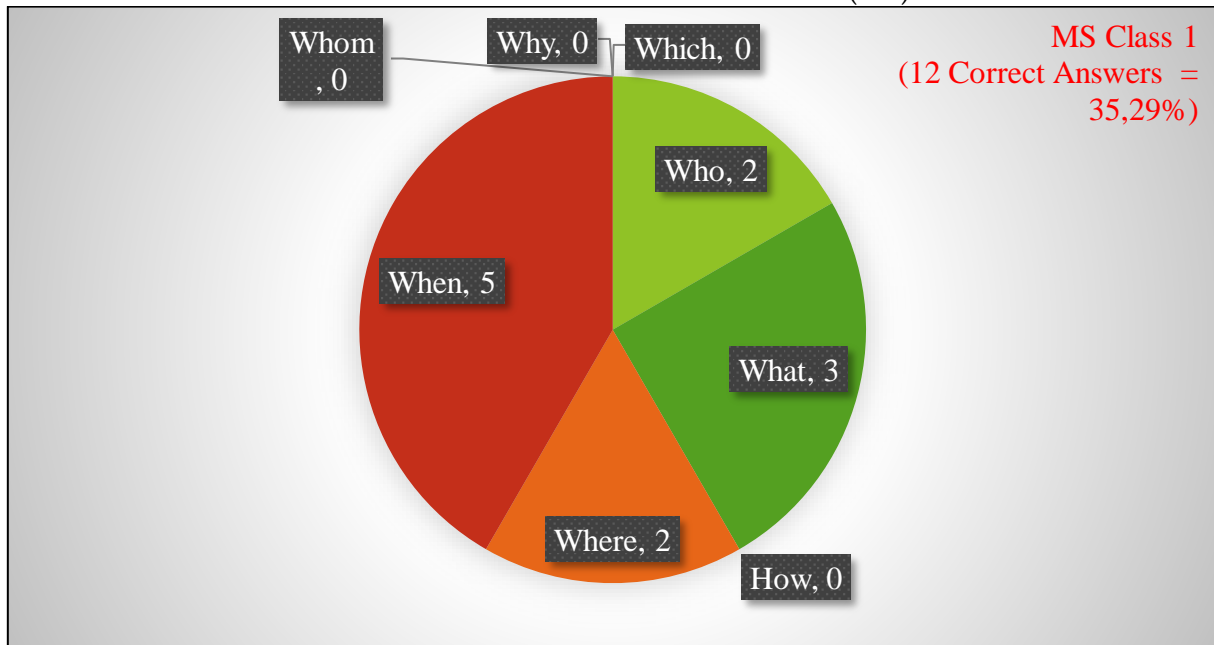


Chart 2: The correct answers of the mainstream (MS) class 1



So, in the first SIOP class, the learners were able to provide us with seven correct answers out of the eight wh-question words. Hence, in the first mainstream class, the learners were able to answer only four questions correctly out of the same eight wh-question words asked to the learners in the first SIOP class.

However, the charts 2 and 3 concerning the correct answers of the learners in the fourth classes of both SIOP and mainstream show that the difference between the two classes in terms of the learners' capacity to understand and answer wh-questions correctly is still very significant. For instance, in the experimentation that was done in the SIOP class 4, the learners were able to answer 22 correct answers out of the 27 questions asked for the whole class, whereas in the mainstream class 4, the learners were able to answer only 11 correct answers out of the same number of questions, which is 27 questions for the whole class (class 4). The same thing can also be noticed in in tables 3 and 4 where the mainstream learners scored more false answers than the learners in the SIOP class (for more details, see charts 3 and 4 below).

Chart 3: The correct answers of the SIOP class 4

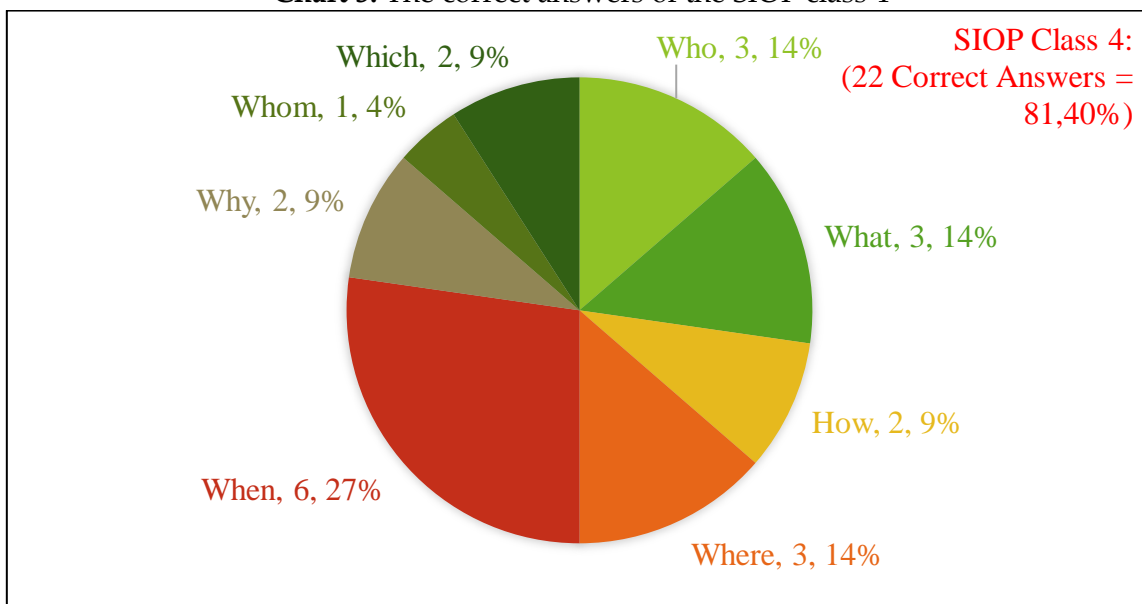
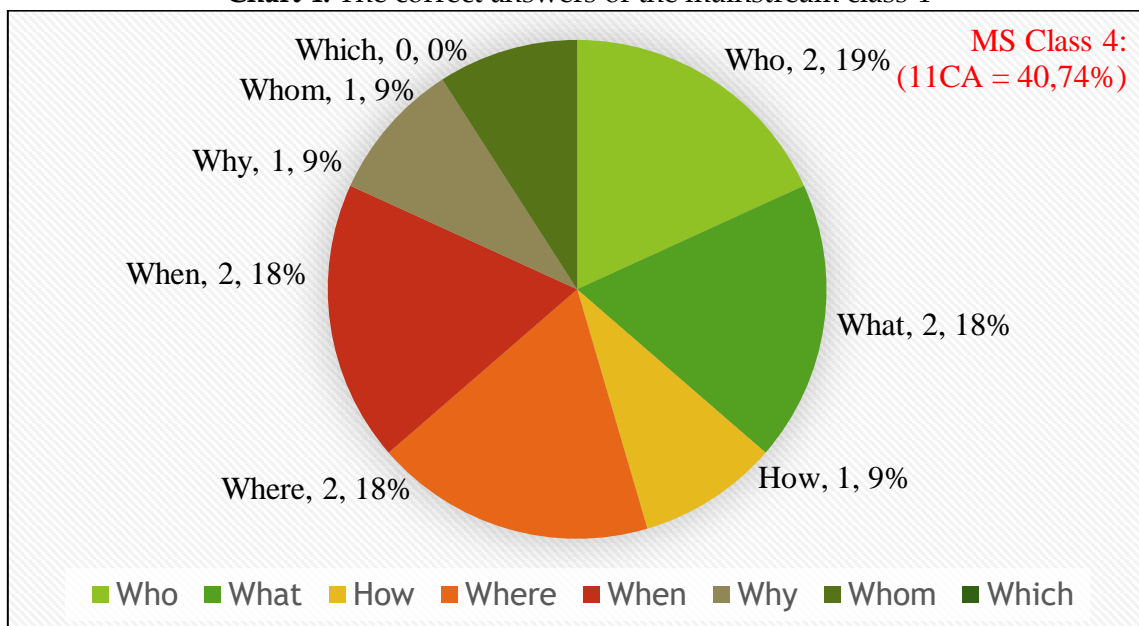


Chart 4: The correct answers of the mainstream class 4



As a matter of fact, the proportion of progression can be noticed clearly in both classes (MS & SIOP). Nevertheless, the major results are noticed clearly among the learners of the SIOP classes.

6. Conclusion

Actually, the statistics and the analysis of the data during this study shows that there is a very significant progress in the English language learners' (ELLs) proficiency and performance in both classes (MS & SIOP) with a crucial difference in the rate of achievement. So, the highest scores are achieved by the learners where the Sheltered Instruction Observation protocol (SIOP) Model is implemented. In fact, the progression is noticed in both methods of teaching. But the big proportion of progression is scored in all the SIOP classes either in terms of the great number of correct answers scored by the learners, or the least mistakes done by these learners in the same classes, or even in terms of the duration of time that the learners took in order to answer the questions, which is shorter in comparison to the results obtained in the mainstream classes in the same experimentation. With no doubt, we can deduce that the SIOP Model has proven through this study that it is an effective teaching model that left a positive impact on the English language learners' achievement and proficiency, especially in terms of their academic performance.

However, the implementation of the SIOP Model tends towards the refinement of the teacher's teaching practices rather than changing them. It is a way of seeking a kind of perfection in every teacher's teaching strategies and methods by making continuous and steady progress.

About the Author

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