

An Investigation into Teachers' First Language Use in a Second Language Learning Classroom Context: A Questionnaire-based Study

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Recently the issue of having recourse to second language (L2) learners' first language (L1) in second language acquisition (SLA) is receiving a great amount of attention in SLA research. There has been a great deal of claims and counter-claims with respect to L1 use in L2 learning. The findings of L2 research to date cast doubt on the rationales of proponents of exclusive use of L2. To date, L2 researchers and practitioners have observed L2 classrooms and have come up with different functions of L1 in L2 learning. The present study investigates teachers' beliefs and perceptions about L1 use in English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) learning context. To this end, seventy-two L2 teachers volunteered to fill in a questionnaire which probed into their beliefs and perceptions about employing learners' L1 (Persian) in L2 (English) learning. The data obtained revealed that the L2 teachers used L1 mainly to provide feedback, teach new vocabulary, explain grammar, build rapport, manage the class, give individual help to learners, and save time in lengthy task explanations. Additionally, in contrast to the L2 studies to date in this field, the teachers expressed that they never fall back on learners' L1 to explain instructions for assignments or projects. The findings might have significant implications for language teachers, in particular in EFL contexts, regarding the facilitative effects of L1 use on L2 learning. The pedagogical implications of the study are explained in detail.

Introduction

Nowadays, the issue of employing second language (L2) learners' first language (L1) in language learning context is receiving considerable research attention from L2 researchers and practitioners. Quite recently there have been key research papers inquiring into L1's role, amount and potential functions (e.g., Azkarai & Mayo, in press; Bruen & Kelly, in press; Kelly & Bruen, in press; Nakatsukasa & Loewen, in press; Thompson & Harrison, 2014, to name but a few). Levine (2014) provides a comprehensive and anew review of the issue of L1 use in foreign language learning classroom context.

The recent findings of L2 research examining the use of L1 in L2 learning undermine the strong L2-only stance advocated frequently by policy makers. The existing body of L2 research in the area of L1 use has shown the positive effect of L1 use on prompting L2 learning (e.g., Atkinson, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Bateman, 2008; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Chavez, 2007; Cheng, 2013; Eldridge, 1996; Grim, 2010; Hancock, 1997;

Horst, White, & Bell, 2010; Kang, 2008; Lee & Macaro, 2013; Leeming, 2011; Liao, 2006; Macaro, 2001, 2009; Pennington, 1995; Scott & de la Fuente, 2008; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009).

However, maximal use of L2 is encouraged due to the fact that for most of L2 learners language classroom is the only context they have at their disposal for L2 exposure (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Additionally, it is claimed that if language teachers have recourse to learners’ L1, the amount of comprehensible L2 input decreases.

While L2 teachers are in favor of minimal L1 use, in practice L1 is used more widely than L2 teachers consider ideal for prompting L2 learning (Oguro, 2011). Scott and de la Fuente (2008) highlight L1 use as a natural and spontaneous cognitive strategy. In the same vein, Sampson (2012) claimed that prohibiting L1 use in language classrooms might be detrimental to L2 development. Ma (2009) considers L1 use as a scaffolding instrument for L2 learners which might result in more effective L2 output.

In a similar vein of research, code-switching, defined as systematic use of L1 within a conversation or utterance, is treated as a competence, even an advanced one, which permits the bilingual speakers to negotiate more fluently (Arnfast & Jorgensen, 2003). More precisely, code-switching requires competence in all the languages involved, and it is simplistic to consider it as simple mixture of two languages (Wei, 2011). Interestingly enough, code-switching is observed wherever bilingual speakers talk to each other (Cook, 2008) and is considered a natural and purposeful phenomenon which facilitates communication and learning (Eldridge, 1996). Therefore, selective and principled code-switching in L2 learning classroom contexts should be seen as a reflection of bilingual and multilingual speakers’ practices in everyday life (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009). So, as it seems to be the case, L2 teachers, instead of considering code-switching as a sign of deficiency in the L2, should acknowledge bilingual competencies and the strategies bilingual learners use. Similarly, it is also observed that code-switching might serve effective social and cognitive functions (Carless, 2008). Exclusive use of L2 in performing tasks might impose cognitive demands on L2 learners which can exert a negative influence on L2 production. Especially, exclusive use of L2 might impede collaborative interaction, inhibit the use of metatalk, and hold back natural learning strategies (Scott & de la Fuente, 2008).

Cook (1999) rightly claims that expecting L2 learners to reach to native speaker proficiency is an unattainable goal. He goes as far as to suggest that L2 users can be regarded as multicompetent language users/bilinguals rather than as deficient native

speakers. Similarly, Willans (2011) claims that language teachers should emphasize bilingual competencies and advocate the strategies which bilingual learners employ in L2 context. Interestingly enough, Cook (2010) argues that the reasons of teaching exclusively in L2 are more commercial and political than being based on SLA theories and research findings.

In sum, recent studies investigating the use of L1 in L2 learning from different perspectives have provided support for the effectiveness of employing learners' L1 in enhancing L2 learning. However, there is limited L2 research investigating the beliefs and perceptions of L2 teachers about L1 use in EFL context. Our primary purpose in the present study is to inquire into L2 teachers' perceptions and beliefs in EFL context to find out L2 teachers' viewpoints about potential functions of L1 in mastering L2 in EFL context in Iran. The next section of the article elaborates on the findings of studies conducted to date examining the functions of learners' L1 in L2 learning classroom context and L2 teachers' perceptions and beliefs about learners' L1 use in L2 classroom.

Functions of Learners' L1 in L2 Classroom

Language learners' L1 use in L2 classroom has triggered a growing body of research. By and large, development and maintenance of learners' L1 appears to prompt L2 learning (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). However, further L2 research is needed to bridge the gap in literature regarding different aspects of L1 use in L2 learning.

To date, SLA researchers have investigated L1 use in L2 learning from different perspectives, in particular the amount of L1 use (e.g., de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009), functions of L1 in L2 learning (e.g., Wilkerson, 2008), and language teachers' and learners' perceptions about L1 use in L2 classroom context (e.g., Levine, 2003).

Inbar-Lourie (2010) observed that teachers generally employ learners' L1 for three main purposes, namely instructional, i.e., facilitating comprehension, explaining grammar, new lexical items and concepts, managerial such as classroom management, providing feedback, and for affective purposes, particularly encouraging and providing comfort for learners. In the same vein, Littlewood and Yu (2011) found that L2 teachers use learners' L1 mainly to establish constructive social relationships, clarify complex meanings, ensure understanding, save time in class, and exert control over the classroom. The results of the study conducted by Storch and Aldosari (2010) showed that participating learners employed L1 mainly for task management and discussing about

vocabulary. They also concluded that L1 may serve important cognitive, social, and pedagogical functions and restricting or prohibiting the use of learners' L1 is to turn a blind eye to an effective tool.

De la Campa and Nassaji (2009) video- and audio recorded samples of two experienced and novice teachers' L2 classes, interviewed the teachers, and conducted stimulated recall sessions to investigate the amount, purpose, and reasons for employing learners' L1 in German (L2) classrooms. Their observations showed that the teachers used a considerable amount of L1 in their teaching. They also found that the teachers did not differ significantly in the overall amount of L1 use. The results also indicated that the novice teacher applied L1 mostly for translating but the experienced teacher deployed learners' L1 exclusively for bringing comfort by making personal comments and jokes.

Wilkerson (2008) investigated the teachers' use of English (L1) in L2 Spanish classrooms. Surprisingly, five college faculties with similar academic background varied widely in the amount of L1-L2 use. He observed that one teacher taught completely in L1 (English) with minimum use of L2 (Spanish) and another taught in L2 but took advantage of L1 through translating and re-teaching lessons in L1 outside of classroom. The data analysis revealed that the teachers employed L1 mainly to control the speed of classroom interactions and activities, eliminate waiting or lag time, and restrict turn-taking by learners. Moreover, the teachers resorted to L1 to avoid ambiguity, save time, establish or assert authority, and manage classroom.

In sum, Cook (2008) asserted that L2 teachers might fall back on learners' L1 for two main reasons, namely for conveying meaning, i.e., using L1 for expressing meaning of lexical items or sentences, and for organizing the classroom, that is to say for managing the classroom, giving instructions for teaching activities, and testing.

L2 Teachers' Perceptions and Beliefs about Learners' L1 Use in L2 Classroom

As already highlighted, there is a gap in L2 research inquiring into teachers' and learners' perceptions and beliefs about employing L1 in L2 learning classroom context. Levine (2003) studied the teachers and learners beliefs and attitudes towards target language use, first language use, and anxiety and came to three pedagogical conclusions. He encouraged the teachers to accept that L1 apparently serves numerous effective functions in L2 classes and ignoring the crucial role of L1 would appear to be a futile attempt

(optimal target language use tenet). Using the L1 simply for the sake of reducing anxiety might not be an effective practice and there is a danger of increasing anxiety during target language use (marked L1 tenet). Finally, students should be assigned an active role in striking balance between target and first language use in classroom (collaborative language use tenet).

Liu, An, Baek, and Ahn (2004) observed that the South Korean high school teachers took advantage of L1 less than what their learners considered appropriate; the teachers' code-switching followed certain patterns and their use of L1 was effective for several functions, namely greetings, instructional comments, questions, lexical and grammatical explanations, offering background information, overcoming communication difficulties, managing students' behavior, compliments or confirmation, saving time, highlighting important information, and personal talk.

Crawford (2004) surveyed the language teachers' attitudes towards L1 use in Australia. The results revealed that teachers' beliefs regarding the purpose of the program might be a key factor in their attitude towards L1-L2 choice. The majority of the respondents believed that their L2 use maximizes learners' experience of L2, the use of L2 reflects teachers' confidence in learners' ability to learn, and L2 is more effective for teaching grammar. She argued that despite the finding that the teachers' own proficiency exerted some effect on levels of L1-L2 use, improving teachers' proficiency will not by itself bring change due to the fact that even highly proficient native speakers resort to L1 at almost all levels of the course.

Ma (2009) studied the attitudes of adult Chinese-background learners and an ESL teacher towards L1 use in an Adult Migrant English Program classroom in Australia. The data analysis indicated that teachers and learners were of the same opinion with respect to the effectiveness of L1 use and it was considered as a valuable pedagogical and cognitive source.

In brief, although L2 studies to date have provided invaluable insights regarding L1 use in L2 learning, yet there is a gap to be closed with respect to L2 teachers' perceptions and beliefs about the potential effect of learners' L1 on enhancing L2 learning.

The Study

Based on the studies cited investigating L1 use in L2 learning, it seems reasonable to underline that learners' L1 can be used efficiently in L2 learning settings. To date, the

researchers in this field have examined the amount of L1 use and its potential functions in L2 learning. However, there is a lack of empirical research in SLA regarding L2 teachers' perceptions and practices about employing learners' L1 in EFL contexts. It is assumed that teachers' perception and practices might provide guidelines which can be scrutinized and be employed effectively under other L2 circumstances. In fact, teacher cognition, i.e., what teachers think, know, and believe is of primary importance in shaping their practice in classroom context (Borg, 2003). Borg goes as far as to stress that we are in urgent need of demystifying what teachers believe and know, their attitudes, and their feelings (Birello, 2012). Teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding L1 use would be considered as the philosophy behind their practices in L2 classroom contexts. To fill this gap in this field, we developed a questionnaire based on L2 research findings examining the functions of L1 in L2 learning which probes into L2 teachers' use of L1 in L2 learning context. It has to be noted that this study used a questionnaire instead of observing and recording the classes to elicit L2 teachers' perceptions and beliefs with respect to using L1 in L2 learning due to practicality concerns and to avoid the observer's paradox.

Thus, the following research question guided the present study: What are the perceptions and beliefs of Iranian L2 teachers about L1 use in L2 learning classroom context?

Context of the Study

The study was undertaken in different private language schools in Iran. The grammar translation method is the dominant method which language teachers employ in English classes in Iranian state schools. The main focus of the syllabus is on grammar, reading, and a very limited number of words and there is little, if any, focus on learners' speaking skill. The English classrooms in Iranian state schools are held mainly in the formal language of instruction in Iran, namely Persian. In contrast, in private language schools the main focus of teachers is on developing speaking skill of learners. Teachers and learners are required to abandon any use of L1 in the classroom context. This stance in turn raises a number of problems, in particular most L2 learners are not able to express themselves in L2, cannot understand teachers' speech, and keep silence due to lack of L2 competency which results in their frustration. Although, in EFL contexts, for instance in Iran, it is commonly assumed that L1 needs to be abandoned in L2 learning classrooms, the findings of L2 research show that through falling back on L1, learners might experience unique opportunities which might result in facilitating L2 learning.

Participants

The study was conducted in various private language schools in different cities of Iran. The questionnaire was distributed to more than one hundred-fifty L2 teachers and they were asked to participate in the study. A total of seventy-two L2 teachers volunteered to participate in the study and completed and returned the questionnaire, producing a response rate of 48%. The participants were thirty-nine females and thirty-three males, ranging in age from 21 to 39. On average, the participants had 7 years of English teaching experience. Twenty-five of the participants had master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), thirty-eight of the participants held bachelor's degree in TEFL, Translation Studies, and English Literature, and nine of the participants held bachelor's and master's degree in other majors who had learnt English in private language schools and were teaching English in private language schools when the study was conducted.

Instruments

The data was obtained through two instruments, a biodata questionnaire and a questionnaire developed by the researchers which inquired into L2 teachers' beliefs and perceptions about L1 use in L2 teaching. The biodata questionnaire involved a number of items which mainly inquired into the respondents' age, degree, and teaching experience. The second questionnaire contained twenty-two items in Likert scale which were statements about the potential functions of learners' L1 which L2 teachers might employ in EFL classroom context. The respondents were required to indicate the extent they practice the L1 functions given in their L2 classroom. To get assurance as the validity and readability of the questionnaire we conducted a pilot study and asked a panel of the researchers to read the questionnaire and provide any feedback regarding the clarity, readability, and linguistic validity of the questionnaire and its items. One of the researchers, also, offered instructive suggestions regarding the content of the questionnaire. Having included the suggestions, we administered the questionnaire through email, personal contact, and colleagues.

Results

The data obtained through the teachers' perceptions and beliefs questionnaire were analyzed to find the teachers' perceptions and beliefs about employing learners' L1 in EFL context. Table 1 represents the percentage of the answers to each item of the questionnaire in detail.

Table 1. The percentage of answers to the items of the questionnaire

| L1 functions in L2 learning classroom | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|---|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| I use learners' L1 to teach new vocabulary. | 81.94 | 15.27 | 2.77 | — | — |
| I employ learners' L1 to explain grammar. | 77.77 | 12.5 | 8.33 | — | 1.38 |
| I use learners' L1 to provide clarification when learners do not understand in L2. | 62.5 | 15.27 | 11.11 | 8.33 | 2.77 |
| I use learners' L1 to provide feedback and explain their errors. | 81.94 | 12.5 | 2.77 | 1.38 | 1.38 |
| I use learners' L1 in giving written corrective feedback on learners' compositions. | 6.94 | 2.77 | 18.05 | 11.11 | 61.11 |
| I use learners' L1 to explain instructions for assignments or projects. | 8.33 | 9.72 | 9.72 | 6.94 | 65.27 |
| I use learners' L1 to give meta-linguistic knowledge, in particular about discussing the tasks, such as the objective and the steps of tasks. | 29.16 | 9.72 | 2.77 | 34.72 | 23.61 |
| I use learners' L1 to negotiate the syllabus and the lesson. | 29.16 | 30.55 | 18.05 | 8.33 | 13.88 |
| I use learners' L1 in administrative issues like exam announcement. | 19.44 | 18.05 | 13.88 | 5.55 | 43.05 |
| I use learners' L1 in dealing with discipline problems in class. | 54.16 | 40.27 | — | — | 5.55 |
| I use learners' L1 to establish or assert authority. | 13.88 | 12.5 | 15.27 | 18.05 | 40.27 |
| I use learners' L1 at the end of the class to answer possible questions. | 49.44 | 13.88 | 11.11 | 10.27 | 15.27 |
| I use learners' L1 to encourage and comfort learners. | 12.5 | 16.66 | — | 5.55 | 65.27 |
| I use learners' L1 to build rapport with learners. | 69.44 | 15.27 | 6.94 | 4.16 | 4.16 |
| I use learners' L1 in giving personal comments. | 43.05 | 16.66 | 15.27 | 12.5 | 12.5 |
| I use learners' L1 in making humorous comments. | 43.05 | 22.22 | 29.16 | 4.16 | 1.38 |
| I use learners' L1 in presenting information about the target culture, in particular discussing cross-cultural issues. | 20.83 | 13.88 | 15.27 | 5.55 | 44.44 |
| I take advantage of learners' L1 to supervise and guide them when they perform a task collaboratively. | 48.6 | 22.22 | 23.61 | — | 5.55 |
| I employ learners' L1 to conduct pre-task activities, namely pre-listening and pre-reading. | 19.44 | 23.16 | 29.16 | 13.88 | 13.88 |
| I use learners' L1 in giving individual help to learners. | 58.37 | 25 | 12.5 | 2.77 | 1.38 |
| I use learners' L1 to save time in lengthy task explanations. | 51.38 | 13.88 | — | — | 34.72 |
| I use learners' L1 in making contrast between L1 and L2. | 6.94 | 15.27 | 16.66 | 26.38 | 34.72 |

Table 2 summarizes the main findings of the data analysis in favor of L1 use.

Table 2. The main findings of the study in favor of L1 use

| L1 functions in L2 learning classroom | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|--|---------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|--------------|
| I use learners' L1 to teach new vocabulary. | 81.94 | 15.27 | 2.77 | — | — |
| I use learners' L1 to explain grammar. | 77.77 | 12.5 | 8.33 | — | 1.38 |
| I use learners' L1 to provide clarification when learners do not understand in L2. | 62.5 | 15.27 | 11.11 | 8.33 | 2.77 |
| I use learners' L1 to provide feedback and explain their errors. | 81.94 | 12.5 | 2.77 | 1.38 | 1.38 |

| | | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| I use learners' L1 in dealing with discipline problems in class. | 54.16 | 40.27 | — | — | 5.55 |
| I use learners' L1 at the end of the class to answer possible questions. | 49.44 | 13.88 | 11.11 | 10.27 | 15.27 |
| I use learners' L1 to build rapport with learners. | 69.44 | 15.27 | 6.94 | 4.16 | 4.16 |
| I use learners' L1 in giving personal comments. | 43.05 | 16.66 | 15.27 | 12.5 | 12.5 |
| I use learners' L1 in making humorous comments. | 43.05 | 22.22 | 29.16 | 4.16 | 1.38 |
| I use learners' L1 to supervise and guide them when learners perform a task collaboratively. | 48.6 | 22.22 | 23.61 | — | 5.55 |
| I use learners' L1 in giving individual help to learners. | 58.37 | 25 | 12.5 | 2.77 | 1.38 |
| I use learners' L1 to save time in lengthy task explanations. | 51.38 | 13.88 | — | — | 34.72 |

Table 3 represents the main findings of the data analysis against L1 use.

Table 3. The main findings of the study against L1 use

| L1 functions in L2 learning classroom | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|---|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|
| I use learners' L1 in giving written corrective feedback on learners' compositions. | 6.94 | 2.77 | 18.05 | 11.11 | 61.11 |
| I use learners' L1 to explain instructions for assignments or projects. | 8.33 | 9.72 | 9.72 | 6.94 | 65.27 |
| I use learners' L1 to give meta-linguistic knowledge, in particular about discussing the tasks, such as the objective and the steps of tasks. | 29.16 | 9.72 | 2.77 | 34.72 | 23.61 |
| I use learners' L1 in administrative issues like exam announcement. | 19.44 | 18.05 | 13.88 | 5.55 | 43.05 |
| I use learners' L1 to establish or assert authority. | 13.88 | 12.5 | 15.27 | 18.05 | 40.27 |
| I use learners' L1 to encourage and comfort learners. | 12.5 | 16.66 | — | 5.55 | 65.27 |
| I use learners' L1 in presenting information about the target culture, in particular discussing cross-cultural issues. | 20.83 | 13.88 | 15.27 | 5.55 | 44.44 |
| I use learners' L1 in making contrast between L1 and L2. | 6.94 | 15.27 | 16.66 | 26.38 | 34.72 |

Figure 1 graphically illustrates the main functions of learners' L1 based on the data obtained through the questionnaire.

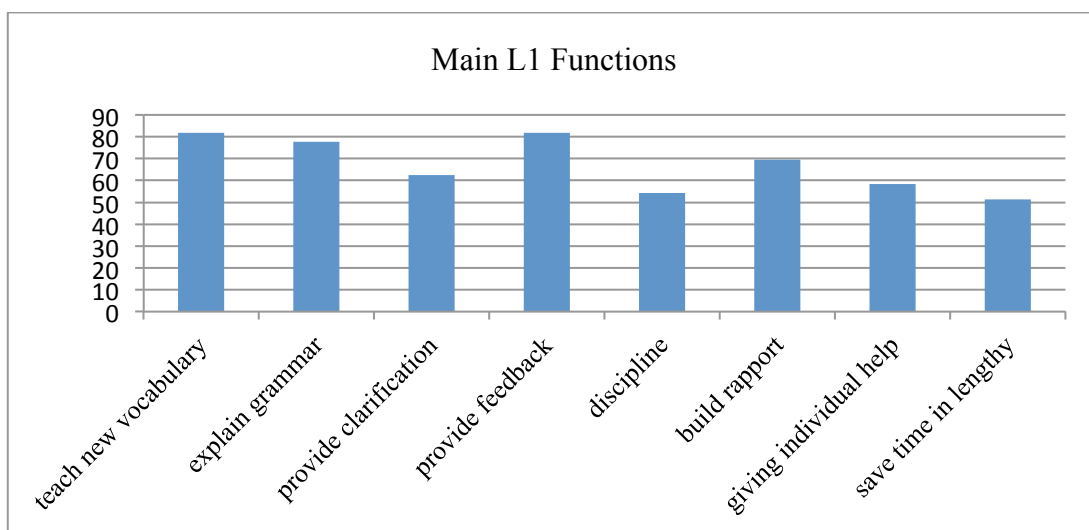


Figure 1. Main findings regarding the functions of L2 learners' L1

Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to continue the line of L2 research attempting to attain a better understanding of the role of L2 learners' L1 in EFL classroom contexts. More specifically, we probed into teachers' perceptions and beliefs with respect to employing L2 learners' L1 in EFL classroom contexts. The results of the data analysis revealed that the teachers employed L2 learners' L1 mainly to teach new lexical items, provide feedback and explain learners' errors, and explain grammar. Interestingly enough, the data analysis showed that the teachers took advantage of learners' L1 to build rapport with learners. Taken together, the findings of the study underscore the importance of learners' L1 in enhancing L2 learning, in particular in L2 vocabulary and grammar teaching. As the data analysis represented, learners' L1 might be employed effectively for different reasons. It seems imperative that L2 teachers need to recognize the efficacy of using L1 in L2 teaching, in particular teaching new vocabulary and grammar. This finding is in line with studies cited. Additionally, learners' L1 can be deployed in class management, namely when teachers come up with discipline issues. It is argued that through using learners' L1 teachers might save time in lengthy task explanations which in turn it leads to more L2 input/output exposure.

Surprisingly enough, teachers' responses indicated a number of findings which are in contrast with previous studies. In contrast to the findings of studies to date investigating the L1 use in L2 learning, most teachers expressed that they never fall back on learners' L1 to explain instructions for assignments or projects. Additionally, they asserted that they never employ learners' L1 in encouraging learners and in giving written corrective feedback, namely providing metalinguistic explanations.

In sum, it can be argued that learners' L1 has the potential to prompt L2 learning and its use should be encouraged. However, it does not mean that L1 use should be used comprehensively. It is argued that learners' L1, as an invaluable asset, needs to be employed effectively and judiciously. L2 teachers should be encouraged to maintain a balance between L1 and L2 use in L2 learning context. Judicious L1 use would act as an effective psychological tool which might result in reducing cognitive overload and learner anxiety (Bruen & Kelly, in press).

In a similar vein, translation in language teaching (TILT) appears to have great potential as an effective pedagogical tool in enhancing L2 learning (Kelly & Bruen, in press). In their recent research, they concluded that "practitioners regard it (*TILT*) instead

as a useful teaching and learning tool that can complement existing pedagogical approaches as one component of an eclectic approach to language teaching and learning” (p. 16). In another study, Bruen and Kelly (in press) argued that “while the goal of maximization of L2 input and interaction is a laudable one, it may not be inconsistent with the judicious use of the L1 in particular instances” (p.5) and “a complete avoidance of the L1, as recommended by approaches derived from the DM (*direct method*) does not reflect the reality of classroom practice” (p.10).

In brief, nowadays, L2 researchers and practitioners claim that it does not seem logical to turn a blind eye to L1 in mastering L2. Hence, this study aimed at throwing a new light on using L1 in L2 learning classroom through inquiring into L2 teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about employing L1 in EFL context.

This study, however, has some limitations that should be acknowledged and that could serve as lines of future studies in this field. The results of this study need to be interpreted with an understanding of its limitations, in particular the sample size, the limitations inherent in questionnaires, and data analysis. Conducting further research with a larger sample size, in different instructional contexts, and taking into account different variables such as learners’ level of L2 proficiency, teachers’ experiences, and individual differences would shed more light on this debated issue. Introspective data, i.e., the inclusion of interviews or stimulated recalls would provide a better understanding of teachers’ perceptions and beliefs about L1 use in L2 learning settings. In doing so, we might come up with the most effective L1 functions in L2 learning which can be advocated in L2 teaching and learning as effective strategies in prompting L2 learning. Also, learners’ viewpoints regarding L1 use should be investigated. More specifically, if we can work out guidelines with respect to employing L2 learners’ L1 in L2 classroom context, it might be used in teacher training programs to shed light on the efficacy of using L1 in L2 learning.

Despite these limitations, the study holds significant implications for language teachers, in particular in EFL contexts, regarding the facilitative effects of L1 use on L2 learning. In a nutshell, rather than considering learners as deficient monolinguals, we, as L2 teachers, need to view them as multilingual competent learners. L2 teachers need to consider L2 learning classroom context as a multilingual social space in which teachers and learners take advantage of “dynamic, creative, and pedagogically effective use of both the target language and the learners’ L1(s)” (Levine, 2014, p. 332). Further research is needed to shed more light on potential effective functions of learners’ L1. In fact,

learners' L1 might serve a lot of pedagogical, discursive, and social functions just as any use of L2 does (Levine, 2014).

In fact, simple exposure to L2 would not appear to be sufficient for L2 learning. Teachers would be recommended to take advantage of learners' shared L1 to make the input comprehensible and enhance effective interaction. However, licensing L2 teachers and learners to employ L1 in classroom context might be a challenging decision due to the fact that striking balance between L1 and L2 would be beyond capability of an inexperienced teacher. Hence, we are in urgent need of more research to legitimate L1 use and provide a framework for judicious use of L1 in L2 learning.

We, also, need to help L2 teachers make informed decisions regarding why, when, and how to use L1 in L2 learning classroom context. This recommendation is supported by the cited research. Variables such as class level, teacher's L1, shared L1, type of tasks, task goals, viewpoints of policy makers, and context would play vital roles in effectiveness or failure of L1 use in fostering L2 learning. Moreover, the effect of teachers' L1 use on learners' subsequent language use needs to be investigated by researchers. Additionally, in future research it will be of interest to study the effect of teacher- and learner-initiated L1 use on L2 learning.

Taken together, it is imperative to stress that teachers play the most important role in L1 use; in a recent study, Thompson and Harrison (2014) observed that majority of teachers opted for L1 substantially in spite of their training and the policies stated clearly sanctioning exclusive target language use.

In conclusion, as Levine (2014) rightly argues, L2 learners' L1 is an invaluable asset just like "the L2 grammar, the textbooks, the teacher, and the cultural production of the learners' new language" (p. 346); so, arguably, setting exclusive use of L2 in classroom context as a goal, without considering a key role for learners' L1, seems unattainable.

With this study and its findings we have taken the L1 use debate a small step forward, but further research is needed to shed more light on this debated strand of L2 research. We do need further studies examining this issue from different perspectives to find cogent responses to the criticisms leveled against using L1 in L2 learning. In conclusion, taking advantage of learners' L1 or abandoning it is at issue and still an open question.

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Appendix A:

L1 Functions in L2 Instruction Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed based on second language acquisition (SLA) research findings with regard to potential functions of second language (L2) learners' first language (L1) in L2 classrooms. Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements and practice them in L2 learning classrooms according to the scale below. Please mark the most appropriate option for each statement

| L1 Functions in L2 learning classroom | Always | Usually | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|---|--------|---------|-----------|--------|-------|
| I use learners' L1 to teach new vocabulary. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to explain grammar. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to provide clarification when learners do not understand in L2. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to provide feedback and explain their errors. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 in giving written corrective feedback on learners' compositions. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to explain instructions for assignments or projects. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to give meta-linguistic knowledge, in particular about discussing the tasks, such as the objective and the steps of tasks. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to negotiate the syllabus and the lesson. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 in administrative issues like exam announcement. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 in dealing with discipline problems in class. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to establish or assert authority. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 at the end of the class to answer possible questions. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to encourage and comfort learners. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to build rapport with learners. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 in giving personal comments. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 in making humorous comments. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 in presenting information about the target culture, in particular discussing cross-cultural issues. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to supervise and guide them when learners perform a task collaboratively. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 to conduct pre-task activities, namely pre-listening and pre-reading. | | | | | |
| I use learners' L1 in giving individual help to learners. | | | | | |

I use learners' L1 to save time in lengthy task explanations.

I use learners' L1 in making contrast between L1 and L2.

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