

## The Role of L1 in ESP Classrooms: A Triangulated Approach

Seyed Mohammad Jafari<sup>1</sup>

Nasrin Shokrpour<sup>2</sup> (Corresponding author)

<sup>1,2</sup>English Department

Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Iran

**Abstract:** *This study investigated the use of students' mother tongue, the Farsi language (L1), in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes at an Iranian medical university, as well as the attitudes of Iranian ESP instructors and ESP students towards employing Farsi in ESP classrooms. Data was collected by means of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire, with 100 ESP students and two ESP instructors participating in the study. The results revealed that ESP instructors used Farsi in specific situations such as explaining grammatical points and new words, managing classroom, explaining instructions, and checking students' understanding. With respect to the second aim of the study, the findings of the semi-structured interviews showed that both instructors held positive attitudes towards employing Farsi in the ESP classroom. Similarly, the results of the questionnaire indicated that ESP students had positive attitudes towards the use of Farsi in their ESP classes.*

**Key words:** *ESP, L1, using L1, L2, teachers' and students' attitudes*

### 1. Introduction

The use of learners' mother tongue (L1) in the second-language (L2) classroom has been one of the main controversial issues for many years (Alseweed, 2012; Hisham Salah & Hakim Farrah, 2012; de la Campa & Nassaji 2009; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Tang, 2002). Some theorists prescribe the monolingual approach in the EFL classroom. The proponents of this approach attribute success in a foreign language to L2 input alone. Therefore, if teachers use L1, they deprive learners of the opportunity to receive input in the target language (Kellerman, 1995; Krashen, 1981; Weschler, 1997). They argue that the process of L2 learning is similar to a child's L1 learning and L2 should be "largely acquired rather than consciously learned, from message-oriented experience of its use" (Mitchell, 1988 as cited in de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009, p. 2). There are, on the other hand, language experts and educators who are in favor of the bilingual approach in L2 classes, viewing the use of L1 as essential for L2 instruction and learning (Cook, 2001; Dedrinos, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Nation, 2003). In support of their position, they adduce both cognitive and psychological reasons. From a cognitive point of view, they assert that adult learners who have already acquired their L1 are 'sophisticated individuals' (Cook, 2001 as cited in de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). L1 is part of their experience and world knowledge which, as an important cognitive tool, can help them in carrying out L2 tasks that are linguistically and cognitively complex (Swain & Lapkin, 2000 as cited in Machaal, 2012). In addition, the use of L1 decreases the psychological obstacles to language learning and allows for a more rapid progression. Janulevicine and Kavliauskiene (2002 as cited in Beressa, 2003, p. 29) assert that "the ability to switch to a native language, even for a shorter time, gives learners

an opportunity to preserve self –image, get rid of anxiety, build confidence and feel independent in their choice of expression”.

However, the exclusion or inclusion of L1 has been based on unexamined assumptions. That is, there has been a dearth of substantial empirical evidence in this area of research (Kayaoglu, 2013). How teachers and learners, as the two key stakeholders, feel about using L1 is of great importance that could be a reliable source for the resolution of dispute. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) point out that “teachers are not mere conveyer belts delivering language through inflexible prescribed and proscribed behaviors...they are professionals who can, in the best of all worlds, make their own decisions” (p, 2). With respect to the role of students’ attitudes, Mouhanna (2009) states that EFL learners as “autonomous learners should reflect on the potential benefits of various learning tools and methods at their disposal” (p.6).

In order to obtain empirical evidence regarding teachers’ and learners’ perspectives on using L1 in L2 classroom, a wealth of research has been carried out in different EFL contexts. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Nofaie (2010) studied the attitudes of 30 female students and three EFL teachers in an intermediate female school. The results revealed that both teachers and learners had positive attitude towards the use of Arabic (L1) in English classroom. Yet, the participants’ attitudes towards using L1 were systematic, in other words, they believed that L1 should be used at certain times and ‘for specific reasons’.

A similar study was conducted by Kim Anh (2010). He explored the EFL instructors’ reactions to using Vietnamese language in teaching and learning English. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used to gather the data. All of the participants advocated the use of Vietnamese in English language teaching (ELT). The results revealed that teachers used L1 in specific situations. Among them, ‘explaining grammatical points’, ‘explaining new words’, and ‘checking for understanding’ were the three most popular situations. Similarly, the attitude survey of McMillan and Rivers (2011) with 29 native-English speaker teachers at a Japanese university provides support for the positive role of L1 in that it has the power to enhance cognition, communication, and social functions in language classrooms.

Nitiswari (2012) has conducted research concerning the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* as L1 in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The findings showed that teachers considered the use of Bahasa Indonesia a useful tool in the process of teaching and learning English. Through observing the teachers’ classes, the researcher found that they use Bahasa Indonesian in specific situations such as explaining difficult words, managing classroom, explaining difficult concepts or grammar. Other research that shows L1 can benefit the EFL instruction was conducted by Mirza, Mahmud and Jabbar (2012) in a Bangladesh context with 60 students and three EFL teachers and produced similar results. The research indicated that EFL teachers used L1 in English classes in specific situations such as explaining difficult grammatical rules, presenting new vocabulary and they did so in accordance to the proficiency level of the learners.

Kayaoglu (2012) conducted a study with 44 EFL teachers in a Turkish EFL classroom to investigate the teachers’ attitudes towards using L1 in the L2 classroom. Overall analysis indicated that a great majority of the teachers were found to take a practical and pragmatic position in the use of L1 instead of adhering to popular beliefs on this topic.

As the literature shows, very little research has studied Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' attitudes towards using L1 (Farsi) in EFL classes. It has also been learned that scant attention has been given to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioners' and learners' perspectives towards using L1 in ESP classes. Therefore, this study aims at answering the following questions:

1. To what extent is Farsi used in Iranian ESP classrooms?
2. What are the attitudes of Iranian ESP instructors and ESP students towards employing Farsi in ESP classrooms?

### 1.1 Significance of the study

The results of this study are significant since they would provide Iranian ESP practitioners with new understandings and insights concerning the use of L1 in ESP classrooms so that they can make their instructional decisions based on sound judgments rather than intuitions. Furthermore, they could help second language teacher educators to reexamine current instructional practices and teaching methodologies in second language teacher education curriculum. Findings of this study help ESP syllabus designers and ESP materials writers to take into account students' L1 while writing language teaching texts and materials and designing the syllabus.

## 2. Methodology

This study used a triangulation mixed method design. In mixed methods research, a researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study in order to "achieve an elaborate and comprehensive understanding of a complex matter, looking at it from different angles" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 164). According to Mackey and Gass (2005) because of the complexity of second language classroom, using multiple research methods and techniques are necessary.

### 2.1 Participants

Two male ESP instructors participated in the qualitative phase of the study. Both of them were holders of M.A.in TEFL and had five years of teaching experience at university level. Both instructors were native speakers of (NS) of Farsi and non-native speakers (NNS) of English. They are referred to below as Kazemi and Bagheri; pseudonyms to keep the participants' identity confidential. They were selected based on a 'purposive sampling method', as the main purpose was to find out teachers who could provide rich and in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation (Dörnyei, 2007).

A total of 100 Iranian ESP students (70 females and 30 males) participated in the quantitative part of the study. They were juniors enrolled in their relevant ESP courses in the spring semester of 2012-2013 at an Iranian medical university. Students majoring in the different fields of medical sciences offered in this university have to pass a four-credit pre-university English course followed by a four-credit General English course and a four-credit semi-specialized course. They are then required to pass a two-credit ESP course. The ESP courses are held once a week for 90 minutes. All of the participants were from four intact groups with approximately 28 in each class. They ranged in age from 20 to 25. Twenty eight were majoring in occupational

health, 27 in environmental health, and 23 in public health. They shared the same L1, i.e. Farsi. All of the participants had studied English for eight years. They were selected through 'convenience sampling'.

## 2.2 Instruments

The three instruments were used in this study: (1) classroom observations, (2) semi-structured interviews, and (3) a questionnaire.

Classroom observation was the first data collection technique used in this study. Observations enable the researcher to rely on real situation facts rather than on 'second hand accounts' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007 as cited in Drosatou, 2009). The major purposes of observing the classroom were to see how frequently and for what purposes the teachers used Farsi in their classes.

The second data collection technique employed in this study was semi-structured interviews. It comprised four items. The reasons for adopting a semi-structured interview were as follows. First, as Nunan (1992 as cited in Chang, 2009) suggests, in a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a general idea of how to unfold the interview. Second, a semi-structured interview is flexible compared with the unstructured and structured interviews so that many researchers within an interpretive research tradition prefer it. The aim of the interview was to understand each ESP teacher's attitudes towards using L1 (Farsi) in ESP classrooms. The interviews were conducted in Farsi. The main reason for doing so was that the researchers assumed that if interviews were conducted in Farsi the interviewees would be able to express themselves more freely because Farsi is their first language. It was also hoped to yield more pertinent information to this study by using the language which these interviewees were more familiar with.

Students' questionnaire was the last data collection technique used in this study. It was developed from the studies by Mirza et al., (2012), Nitiswari (2012), and Al-Nofaie (2010). Necessary modifications and adaptations were made to appeal to the Iranian context. The questionnaire consists of 17 statements which are based on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from *Always* to *Never*. The first five items were designed to explore the learners' attitudes about using L1 in ESP class and the rest of the questionnaire explored students' perspectives concerning the use of L1 for teaching different language functions. The questionnaire statements were translated from English into Farsi by one of the researchers, and three Iranian university professors verified the accuracy through a back-translation process. The students' questionnaire was used to elicit the attitude of students towards the use of L1 in ESP classrooms. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was .82 based on Cronbach's alpha, which was high enough.

## 3. Data collection procedure and analysis

In this study data were collected during the second semester of the Iranian academic year 2012-2013 through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire.

After written permission was obtained from the selected teachers, two ESP classes were observed. To this end, the audio recording was used to find out how frequently and on what occasions the teachers used L1. The written notes were also used to complement the data

collected from audio recordings during the observation. Each class was recorded sequentially three times for 90 minutes. To obtain more authentic classroom data, the teachers and students were not informed of the observation goal beforehand. This was done to avoid the risk of sensitizing and tempting them to show behavior different from the usual ones and thereby to obtain a more authentic classroom data. The researcher took on the role of a non-participant observer. For the analysis of the data from the classroom recordings the researchers chose the methodology proposed by Duff and Polio (1990), which is known as the 'method of sampling'. This method, compared with the other two methods (word counting and function analysis), was thought efficient enough to provide general information about how frequently the two teachers used L1 and L2 in class and the least time-consuming method (Song, 2009). In this method, every fifteen seconds the language of the utterance being spoken at that time was noted.

After the classes were audio recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the two ESP teachers whose classes were observed. The main focus of the interviews was to gain a richer and in-depth understanding of ESP teachers' perspectives on using L1 (Farsi) in L2 classes. The interviews were carried out in L1 (Farsi) and each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The idea of using Farsi in the interview sessions was based on the suggestion of Professor Gass. She believes that using someone's native languages allows the researcher to be more confident that the comments reflect what the individual intends. On the other hand, conducting an interview in the learner's second language leaves one with the possibility of needing to interpret what is said (Susan Gass, personal communication, June22, 2012). All the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It organizes and describes your data set in rich detail" (p. 79). The use of thematic analysis in this study was due to its 'flexibility'. In other words, this method is independent of theory and epistemology, and can be applied across a wide range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The last data collection technique was a questionnaire which aimed to elicit ESP students' attitudes towards the use of L1 in ESP classes. Following a brief explanation and clear instructions by one of the researchers, the questionnaire was administered to the participants who were given 15 minutes to answer the questions. The participants were assured by the researchers that strict confidentiality would be observed with respect to all of the information and data obtained from them, and that only anonymous cumulative data results would be made public. The participants were also assured by the researchers that their performance on the reading comprehension test would have no bearing on the participants' course grades. Data analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 16.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 The results of question number one**

*1. To what extent is Farsi used in ESP classrooms?*

#### **4.1.1 The amount of L1 (Farsi) used in ESP classroom**

In order to explore the extent of the use of L1 in ESP classroom six sessions were recorded in this study. As mentioned earlier, the collected data from classroom observation were categorized on the basis of Duff and Polio's (1990) coding system, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Coding system of language use in class (adapted from Duff and Polio 1990)

L 1: The utterance is completely in Farsi
L1c: The utterance is in Farsi with one word or phrase in English
Mix: The utterance is, approximately, an equal mixture of Farsi and English
L2c: The utterance is in English with one word or phrase in Farsi
L2: The teachers' utterance is completely in English

Based on the above categorization, Tables 4.1 and 4.2 present the breakdown of language used by the two ESP instructors. The L1 and L1c classifications were both considered to be Farsi and, likewise, L2 and L2c were taken into account to be English.

Table 4.1. Summary of L1 (Farsi) and L2 (English) used by Mr. Kazemi

Lesson	L1 & L1c (%)	Mix (%)	L2 & L2c (%)	Total
1	6.58	5.15	88	100%
2	6.98	6.02	87	100%
3	6.55	3.45	90	100%
Average	6.70	4.87	88.34	100%

As Table 4.1 shows, Mr. Kazemi used Farsi in every observed session. The data seem to show that the judicious use of Farsi does not hinder L2 learning. In other words, the instructor used Farsi in a sensible and careful way and provided learners with high quantity of L2 input as he was aware that in an EFL context little opportunity exists for exposure to the L2 outside the classroom. This finding is in line with studies by Al-Nofaie (2010), Nitiswari (2012), Mirza et al. (2012), and Kim Anh (2012) that support the limited use of L1, not the overuse of L1. In a similar vein, Ellis (1984) claims that too much use of L1 should be avoided because it could "deprive the learners of valuable input in the L2" (p. 133). The judicious use of L1, however, could assist the learners in overcoming the problems, dilemmas, and confusions generated by the extensive use of L2 (Mirza et al., 2012).

Table 4. 2. Summary of L1 (Farsi) and L2 (English) used by Mr. Bagheri

Lesson	L1 & L1c (%)	Mix (%)	L2 & L2c (%)	Total
1	5.11	8.89	86	100%
2	3.14	3.86	93	100%
3	2.86	6.14	91	100%
Average	4.87	6.13	89	100%

As Table 4.2 presents, Mr. Bagheri also used English and Farsi together in teaching English. However, his use of Farsi appeared to be limited as he was aware that the excessive use of Farsi may hinder learning English. The results also reveal that the percentages of L1 use, excluding the mix category, ranged from 2.86% to 5.1% with an overall average of 4.87%, while the percentages of L2 use ranged from 86% to 93% with the average number of 89%. This result is consistent with studies by de la Campa and Nassaji (2009), Macaro (2001), Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002), and McMillan and Rivers (2011). The quantity of L1 used in the classroom confirms Atkinson's (1987) view. He states that a ratio of 5% native language and 95% of the target language may be more profitable. However, the results are inconsistent with Kaneko's (1992) study. He found that teachers and students used L1 51% to 74% in senior classes and 64% to 83% in junior classes.

General speaking, teachers' beliefs about the limited use of L1 in these ESP classrooms could be attributed to other factors besides the pedagogical issues mentioned above. Each teacher's own language learning history, the way that they have been taught, teachers' teaching experiences, their experiences as L2 learners, department's policies and students' level of proficiency are bound to be formative. For example, by looking at the syllabus objectives of these courses, it is clear that the English department encourages instructors to adopt a more communicative approach in which L1 avoidance is a key feature (McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

In order to obtain comprehensive data of the use of Farsi in ESP classroom, this study also tried to calculate the situations in which L1 was used in the classroom. The breakdown of the situations in which L1 used is illustrated in Table 4.3 and 4.4 below.

Table 4.3 Mr. Kazemi's use of Farsi in ESP classroom

Situations	Frequencies	Percentage
Explaining grammatical points	21	23%
Explaining new words	23	27%
Classroom management	14	16%
Explain instructions	22	25%
Checking students' understanding	10	9%

Table 4.4 Mr. Bagheri's use of Farsi in ESP classroom

Situations	Frequencies	Percentage
Explaining grammatical points	19	22%
Explaining new words	29	33%
Classroom management	18	19%
Explain instructions	16	14%
Checking students' understanding	8	12%

As Table 4.3 illustrates, the first teacher (Mr. Kazemi) employed Farsi in a variety of situations. Among them, 'explaining new words' (27%), 'explain instructions' (25%), and 'grammatical points' (23%) were the most popular situations. Table 4.4 shows that the second teacher (Mr. Bagheri) used L1 for the same purposes. These findings concur with those of previous studies

(Mirza et al, 2012; Kim Anh, 2012; Primary 2012; Nitiswari, 2012; Emilia 2011; Al-Nofaie, 2010; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Meyer, 2008; Tang, 2002) that found similar purposes for L1 use by the teachers they investigated. Regarding giving a Farsi equivalent for unknown word, the finding supports the belief that learners prefer to learn new vocabulary via translation, which could be the most effective strategy and less time consuming (Kim Anh, 2012; Nation, 2003; Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003). With respect to the use of Farsi to give instructions about the activities that are performed for the first time, some researchers (e.g., Kim Anh, 2012; Cook, 2001; Tang, 2002) believe that explaining an instruction in English is time-consuming and ineffective work but providing activity instructions in L1 “allows learners to quickly engage with and practice using L2” (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Explaining grammatical points in L1 seems appropriate as Cook (2001) argues that “the main argument for using the L1 for grammar is efficiency of understanding by students” (p. 7).

## 4.2 The results of question number two

*What are ESP practitioners' and students' perceptions of the inclusion of Farsi in ESP classrooms?*

The ESP instructors' and ESP students' beliefs regarding the use of L1 in ESP classroom were elicited through semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire respectively. The semi-structured interviews were based on the following key questions:

- 1). What is the best method in teaching ESP?
- 2). What is the ideal percentage of using Farsi in ESP classroom?
- 3). What are the benefits of using Farsi in ESP classroom?
- 4). In which situations you use Farsi in ELT?

### 4.2.1 The bilingual approach is the best method in teaching ESP

First, qualitative results revealed that both of the ESP instructors believe that bilingual method is the best method in teaching ESP. They stated that successful learning does not involve the separation of L1 from L2, which supports the findings of the previous studies conducted by Harbord (1992), Carless (2001), and Macaro (1997), who stated that the use of L1 in L2 classroom is unavoidable. The teachers also argued that using the bilingual approach would enhance the affective environment for learning. This point of view is congruent with what is stated by Rivera (1990), Yolagani (2009) and Auerbach (1993), that using L1 in L2 class reduces affective barriers to English language acquisition and allows for more rapid progress to or in ESL.

Mr. Kazemi said:

Personally, I consider the bilingual method the best approach that should be employed in our context. Learners have already got used to it at school. As we know, at high school teachers use the students' mother tongue in L2 classes. When students come to university, they

would find it difficult to accustom themselves to English only approach. It is difficult for us as well. The English department urges us to follow CLT, but there are times that not using L1 seems impossible. After five years' teaching at university, I've come to realize that prohibiting the mother tongue within L2 class would impede language acquisition. I've also found that overuse of L1 would hinder L2 learning. So, judicious use of L1 helps learners to grasp materials easily and feel comfortable in L2 class.

Mr. Bagheri stated:

In my view, in our context bilingual method is much more effective than CLT. Considering ESP students, they are in the category of non-major English students who just take three to four English courses at university. So they are not competent enough to understand all materials in English. I have come to understand that Farsi could not be separated from classroom activities. By explaining some activities in English, you just waste time.

#### 4.2.2 The ideal percentage of L1 in ESP classroom

With respect to the percentage of using Farsi in the ESP classroom, both of the instructors asserted that less than 10% of Farsi and more than 90% of English are an ideal percentage. This idea is supported by Atkinson (1987) and Tang (2002) who assert that 5% of L1 and 95% of target language seems appropriate. Both of the teachers stated that they use much more English in classes in which students are much more competent. Considering students' level of language proficiency is in line with Hawks (2001), Stern (1992), Atkinson (1987), and de la Campa and Nassaji (2009).

Mr. Kazemi said:

I think less than 10% of Farsi and more than 90% of English will be more fruitful. However, students' language proficiency should be taken into account. When I see that students are weaker than I thought first, I increase the use of Farsi. And if I see progress, I'll try to decrease that amount of Farsi.

Mr. Bagheri stated that

Well, I'm in favor of 5% of L1 and 95% of target language, since I think L2 class means learning a new language. So, students should be exposed to target language as much as possible. It should be stated here, however, that I do not always stick to this idea. I have had ESP classes that were not able to grasp the materials when I used around 90% of English. It always happens for students who already got their associate degrees from less prestigious universities. They complain that their instructors have used the translation

method during that program. I completely understand them and try to increase the quantity of Farsi in L2 class.

### 4.2.3 The advantage of using L1 in the EFL classroom

Both of the instructors argue that first language helps students to understand and process the target language. This finding corroborates the previous studies carried out by Mirza et al, (2012), Emilia (2011), Al-Nofaie (2010), Tang (2002), Kim Anh (2012), Nitiswari (2012). However, this finding is in sharp contrast with some of language theorists such as Odlin (1989), Kellerman (1995), Krashen (1981), and Macdonald (1993), as they argue that using L1 in L2 classroom would impede language learning. The teachers believe that L1 can motivate students in learning the target language and solve their problems during the learning process, which is supported by Pennington's (1995), Primary (2012), and Atkinson's (1993) studies. Furthermore, one of the teachers stated that L1 can be beneficial as a cognitive tool that assists in second language learning, which is supported by some studies (e.g. Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Pinter, 2006; Watanabe, 2008).

Mr. Kazemi said:

Well, using L1 would facilitate language acquisition. L1 is an important cognitive tool especially in classroom activities related to linguistic information such as how to remember the list of words, how to guess the meaning of unknown words etc.

Mr. Bagheri said that

I think L1 should not be banned in L2 classroom since it paves the way for learning a foreign language. The inclusion of L1 in L2 classroom makes learning the new language easier, as it enables them to compare the new language knowledge with their existing knowledge of their L1.

### 4.2.4 Purposes of using L1 in L2 classroom

With respect to the functions of using L1, both instructors suggest the situations in which Farsi should be used in ESP classroom. They assert that they use L1 in situations such as 'explaining new words', explaining 'grammatical points', 'checking for understanding'. These results are in agreement with many existing studies (e.g. Kim Anh, 2012, Mirza et al, 2012; Nitiswari, 2012; Primary, 2012; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Khati, 2011; Nation, 2003; Zacharias, 2003). They said, however, these situations should not be fixed.

Mr. Kazemi said:

I always use Farsi to explain abstract words and complex grammatical points. I have found that students understand better and more clearly. Using L2 in these situations is also a time-consuming activity. I should emphasize here that I might change this technique in a class with a higher level. In this context, I try to do explain new

words and grammatical points in English. If I see that it works, I'll cover the rest of the lesson in English as well.

Mr. Bagheri stated:

Farsi is very effective in explaining jargon and complex grammatical points since if I follow an 'English only' approach, students will become confused and frustrated. I also praise my students through Farsi. After describing a point, I use Farsi to see whether they have grasped it or not. As they will be asked in future to translate their specialized texts into Farsi or vice versa, I ask them to do English-Farsi-English translation exercises in order to improve their translation skill.

#### 4.2.5 ESP students' perception towards using Farsi

In this section, the data collected by the questionnaire will be illustrated.

Table 5. ESP students' perceptions towards using L1

Items	Percentage
1	98%
2	77%
3	68%
4	79%
5	54%
6	88%
7	77%
8	43%
9	71%
10	36%
11	63%
12	25%
13	72%
14	59%
15	39%
16	80%
17	50%

As Table 5 illustrates, almost all students responded positively regarding the use of Farsi in ESP classes (Item 1, 98%). With respect to the favored areas for using Farsi, explaining new words, as illustrated in the table, was ahead of the other areas (item 6, 88%). This result backs the beliefs that learners prefer to learn new words via translation since providing an L1 equivalent could help students understand more clearly and easily (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Nation, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). The result also revealed that 80% of the students responded positively concerning the use of Farsi for explaining grammatical points (item 16). Many students (77%) thought that their ESP instructor should use Farsi to contrast the English and Farsi languages

(item 7). This finding is inconsistent with the critics of contrastive analysis (CA). They believe that native language interference is not the sole or main cause of errors in second language learning (Klein, 1986; Noblitt, 1972). However, some scholars (e.g. Keshavarz 2012, Yarmohamadi & Rashidi, 2009; Fallahi, 1991) argue that using CA would lead to better language learning.

However, some areas in which students were against using Farsi have been detected. For example, students were enormously against using Farsi in explaining the content of the text (item 7, 77%). This finding reveals that students were highly motivated.

## 5. Conclusion

Regarding the first question, the results of this study showed that both ESP instructors used Farsi in ESP classroom. Moreover, there was not any significant difference in the amount of Farsi used by both instructors. The first instructor used 6.70 % of Farsi and 88.34 % of English and the second instructor used 4.87 of Farsi and 89% of English. It means that the instructors were aware of the disadvantages of the overuse of Farsi. The results also revealed the situations for which the instructors used Farsi. Explaining grammatical points and new words, managing classroom, explaining instructions, and checking students' understanding were the main areas for using Farsi by the instructors.

With respect to the second question, the results of the interview revealed that both of the instructors had positive attitudes towards using L1 in ESP classroom. Similarly, the results of the questionnaire indicated that ESP students had positive attitudes towards employing Farsi in ESP classroom.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to Professors Ray Harlow and Brian McMillan for constructive feedback and insightful suggestions which greatly improved this article. We are also grateful to the two anonymous referees for detailed and expert comments that helped improved many aspects of the manuscript.

## References

- Al-Nofaie, H. (2010). The attitudes of teachers and students towards using Arabic in EFL classrooms in Saudi public schools: a case study. *Novitas-Royal (Research on Youth and Language)*, 4 (1), 64-95.
- Alseweed, M. A. (2012). The effectiveness of using L1 in teaching L2 grammar. *International Journal of English and Education*, 1(2), 109-120.
- Antón, M., & DiCamilla, F. (1998). Socio-cognitive functions of L1 collaborative interaction in the L2 classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 54(3), 315-342.
- Atkinson, D. (1987). The mother tongue in the classroom: A neglected resource? *ELT Journal*, 41(4), 241-247.
- Atkinson, D. (1993). *Teaching monolingual classes*. London: Longman.
- Auerbach, E. R. (1993). Re-examining English only in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(1), 9–32.

- Beressa, K. (2003). *Using L1 in the EFL classroom: The case of the Oromo language with particular reference to Adama College teachers*. M.A. thesis, Addis Ababa, South Africa. Retrieved from <http://etd.aau.edu.et/dspace/bitstream/123456789/3071/1/33704784571065509921408755732>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Chang, F. H. (2009). *Language learning strategies of Taiwanese college level EFL/ESL students*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Alliant International University, San Diego. UMI Number: 3388918
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cook, V. (2001). Using the first language in the classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 57(3), p. 402-423.
- Dedrinou, B. (2006). Skills to communicate translatable experiences. In B. Dedrinou and M. Drossou (Eds.), *Practices of English Language Teaching* (pp. 25-36). Athens: The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.
- Drosatou, V. (2009). *The use of the mother tongue in English language classes for young learners in Greece*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, the UK.
- Duff, P. A., & Polio, C. G. (1990). How much foreign language is there in the foreign language classroom? *The Modern Language Journal*, 74(2), 154-166.
- de la Campa, J. & Nassaji, H. (2009). The amount, purpose, and reasons for using L1 in L2 classrooms. *Foreign Language Annals*. 42(4), 742-759. doi: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.2009.01052.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford:Oxford University Press.
- Fallahi, M. (1991). *Contrastive linguistics and analysis of errors*. Tehran: Iran University Press.
- Harbord, J. (1992). The use of the mother tongue in the classroom. *ELT Journal*, 46(4), 350-355.
- Emilia, E. (2011). *The English only in Indonesian EFL classroom: Is it desirable?* Thailand: Assumption University Press.
- Hisham Salah, N. M., & Hakim Farrah, M. D. (2012). Examining the use of Arabic in English classes at the primary stage in Hebron government schools, Palestine: Teachers' perspective. *Arab World English Journal*, 3(2), 400-436.
- Januleviciene, V., Kavaliauskiene, G. (2002). Promoting the fifth skill in teaching esp. Retrieved from [http://www.espworld.info/Articles\\_2/Promoting%20the%20Fifth%20Skill%20in%20Teaching%20ESP%20](http://www.espworld.info/Articles_2/Promoting%20the%20Fifth%20Skill%20in%20Teaching%20ESP%20).
- Kayaoglu, M, N. (2012). The use of mother tongue in foreign language teaching from teachers' practice and perspective. *Pamukkale University Journal of Education*, 32(2), 25-35.
- Kellerman, E. (1995). Cross-linguistic influence: Transfer to nowhere? *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 15, 125-150.
- Keshavarz, M. H. (2012). *Contrastive analysis & error analysis*. Tehran: Rahnama Press.
- Khatai, A. R. (2011). When and why of the mother tongue use in English classrooms. *Journal of NELTA*, 16(2), 42-51.

- Kim Anh, K. H. (2010). Use of Vietnamese in English language teaching in Vietnam: Attitudes of Vietnamese university teachers. *English Language Teaching*, 3(2), 119-128.
- Klein, W. (1986). *Second language acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krashen, S., 1981. *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (3<sup>rd</sup>ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Macaro, E. (2001). Analyzing student teachers' codeswitching in foreign language classrooms: Theories and decision making. *The Modern Language Journal*, 85, 531–548. doi: 10.1111/0026-7902.00124
- Macdonald, C., 1993. *Using the target language*. Cheltenham: Mary Glasgow.
- Machaal, B. (2012). The use of Arabic in English classes: A teaching support or a learning hindrance? *Arab World English Journal* 3(2), 194-231.
- Mackey, A., & Gass, S (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McMillan, P., Rivers, D. J. (2011). The practice of policy: Teacher attitudes toward "English Only". *System*, 39, 251-263. doi:10.1016/j.system.2011.04.011
- Mirza, G. H., Mahmud, K., & Jabbar, J. (2012). Use of other languages in English language teaching at tertiary level: A case study on Bangladesh. *English Language Teaching*, 5(9), 71-77. doi:10.5539/elt.v5n9p71
- Mouhanna, M. (2009). Re-examining the role of L1 in the EFL classroom. *UGRU Journal*, 8, 1-19.
- Nation, P. (2003). The role of first language in foreign language teaching. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 5(2), 1-8.
- Nitiswari, N. (2012). *The role of L1 in EFL classroom: Perspectives of senior high school teachers and students*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Universitas Pendidikan, Indonesia. Retrieved from [http://www.repository.upi.edu/.../t\\_bing\\_0907767\\_pdf](http://www.repository.upi.edu/.../t_bing_0907767_pdf)
- Noblitt, J. S. (1972). Pedagogical grammar. *IRAL*, 10(4), 28-37.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research Methods in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Odlin, T. (1989). *Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinter, A. (2006). *Teaching young language learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Primary, M. G. (2012). *The use of first language (L1) in EYL classroom*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Universitas Pendidikan, Indonesia. Retrieved from [http://www.repository.upi.edu/.../t\\_ing\\_0907573\\_pdf](http://www.repository.upi.edu/.../t_ing_0907573_pdf)
- Rolin-Ianziti, J., & Brownlie, S. (2002). Teacher use of the learners' native language in the foreign language classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58(3), 204–218.
- Rivera, K. (1990). Developing native language literacy in language minority adult learners. Retrieved from <http://www.ericdigests.org/1993/native.htm>
- Song, Y. (2009). An investigation into L2 teacher beliefs about L1 in China. Retrieved from <http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/.../YananSong.pdf> <sup>مشايه</sup>
- Storch, N., & Wigglesworth, G. (2003). Is there a role for the use of the L1 in an L2 setting? *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 760-770.
- Tang, J. (2002). Using L1 in the English classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, 40, 36-43.

Storch, N., & Wigglesworth, G. (2003). Is there a role for the use of the L1 in an L2 setting? *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 760-770.

Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (2000). Task-based second language learning: the uses of the first language. *Language Teaching Research*, 4 (3), 251-274.

Weschler, R. (1997). Uses of Japanese (L1) in the English Classroom: Introducing the Functional Translation Method. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3(11), 1-12.

Yarmohamadi, L., & Rashidi, N. (2009). *Practical contrastive analysis of English and Persian with special emphasis on grammar*. Tehran: Rahnama Press.

Yolagani, A. (2009). The advantages of the use of mother tongue in foreign language classroom. Retrieved from [http:// www. yolagani. wordpress. com/2009/.../advantages-](http://www.yolagani.wordpress.com/2009/.../advantages-)

Zacharias, N. T. (2003). *A survey of tertiary teachers' beliefs about English language teaching in Indonesia with regard to the role of English as a global language*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, Assumption University, Thailand. Retrieved from <http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/thesis.php...>