

A Literature Review on Using the First Language (L1) in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Among foreign students themselves, the usage of L1 (first language) in the EFL classroom has long drawn attention. It was seen as a challenge to teach the TL without utilizing L1, as it was frequently used in the learning technique to teach other languages. This paper analyzed and emphasized the usage of L1 in classroom instruction in EFL. The literature study was conducted using a review and analysis of around 7 relevant journal publications. The outcome demonstrated how using L1 in the EFL classroom helped to foster a good learning environment. It indicates that students' views regarding the usage of L1 in the EFL classroom were good, as seen by their willingness such as in receiving instructions, understanding difficult topics, learning new vocabularies, and socializing in the classroom. The study result recommends looking into the effect of the use of L1 in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: EFL Classroom, Foreign Language, L1

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INTRODUCTION

Since bilingualism in linguistics has become more common, there has been a concern with language use in EFL classrooms. The benefits and drawbacks of employing students' first languages (L1) and the target language (TL) in the EFL classroom, in particular, appear to be subject to a variety of viewpoints. The popularity of different methodologies and approaches has changed over time, which is the primary cause of a shift. When teaching any other language in the past, early teaching techniques commonly included the learners' first language (L1), and it was thought to be difficult to teach a target language without doing so. Using L1 in an EFL classroom might become a "slippery slope," significantly underexposing students to the target language and, as a result, leading to subpar learning outcomes (Macdonald, 1993; Polio & Duff, 1994; Wells, 1999).

When students are exposed to the TL (target language) the most through topic learning in a natural, conversational situation, they acquire a foreign or second language more successfully (Blackman, 2014). The students' performance may suffer if they are exposed to L1 while learning English, based on those who support its usage in EFL classrooms. Other researchers warn against overusing L1, but support its use in situations like stimulating

language, checking comprehension, delivering instructions, and teaching grammar (Pan & Pan, 2010).

Contrarily, Harmer (2007) believes that adopting L1 encourages fundamental students and educators contact, enables students to talk about their learning, and enhances the social environment in the EFL classroom. Students avoid speaking when the TL is the only permitted medium for conversations due to fear or a lack of English competency (Liao, 2006). However, there is more fascinating conversation and longer-lasting sustained engagement when both L1 and TL are employed as conversation medium. The reasons why some EFL teachers choose to use only English in the classroom while others choose to employ both the TL and L1 appear to be equally as varied. When L1 is utilized in the classroom, students can make comparisons between the structural differences between their native tongue and English. Comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 structures has been found to help students comprehend words and give them additional meaning (Bowen, 2013). Theodosiou (2016) states that "teaching should encourage students' curiosity about language and culture and give them the opportunity to acquire plurilingualism, which obviously implies that other languages should be used in the EFL classroom."

According to Suhayati (2018), teachers showed a slightly positive opinion regarding the usage of L1 in EFL classes. L1 serves as both the function of classroom management and teaching tools in this context. The findings also demonstrate that using L1 sparingly and carefully was effective and might be crucial in accelerating a foreign language in the English learning context. Debreli (2016) investigates how teachers see when L1 should be utilized in an L2 classroom. In this investigation, there are two perspectives. When students were highly adept in using the L2 and instructors did not want the L1 to determine the pace of their classes, non-native EFL teachers were concerned. Similar findings were made by Kayaoğlu (2012) who discovered that although teachers preferred not to utilize L1 with higher-level pupils, they were more likely to do so for lower-level students. In his study, the teacher's major concern was saving time, therefore they preferred utilizing L1 when they had limited time to teach a topic and used L1 when they wanted to save time without taking their knowledge levels into consideration.

The writer concluded from the aforementioned studies that there were still a lot of uncertainty among practitioners and scholars, requiring more study of the topic. Additionally, the majority of the study was conducted in the country in question or at a specific level by a certain institute. The aim of this study was to provide solutions and provide information on the issue of instructional language choice in the EFL classroom. There were several definitions for some of the terms used in this literature study, which are also connected to the usage of L1 and TL in the classroom. It also explained why it's crucial to look into the study on the integration of the target language and the student's native tongue in EFL classroom.

METHOD

This study used a semi-systematic literature review. This review method, sometimes referred to as a narrative review technique (Snyder, 2019). It was used to assess a number of topics that have been looked at by various groups or researchers. The semi-systematic or narrative review technique was also intended for topics that have been understood differently,

researched by several groups of researchers across various fields, and that obstruct a full systematic review process (Wong et al., 2013). In order to identify supported and relevant studies, keyword searches such as "first language," "L1," "L2," and "code-switching" were utilized to acquire material from several journals and databases.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher used these keywords and a publication year range of 2015 to 2021 to select and evaluate 7 relevant journal articles. These 7 publications with peer review were chosen mostly due to their quality, relevance, and currentness. In this case, it is explained regarding the authors and the title details, important notes, and personal notes, as described.

Table 1. Results of Article Reviewed

Authors and Title Details	Important Note	Personal Note
Nurhamidah et al., (2018) Code-switching in EFL classroom: Is it good or bad?	Code-switching as a benefit to convey material for teachers and communicate and receive material in class for students.	The purpose of code-switching, how language is taught and learned, what teachers and students think about code-switching, and how code-switching functions.
Suhayati (2018) Teachers' Attitudes toward the Use of L1 in the EFL Classroom.	L1 was used as a tool for instruction and in classroom management to improve outcomes for learning.	The points of view of teachers towards the use of mother tongue in English as a Foreign Language classroom.
Shabir (2017) Student-teachers' beliefs on the use of L1 in EFL classroom: A global perspective	L1 instruction is advantageous in EFL classrooms.	Students' and instructors' agreement and disagreement over the use of L1 in the classroom.
Puspawati (2018) Teachers' use of code switching in EFL classroom and its functions	The functions of these Code-Switching in the teaching and learning process as used by Indonesian teachers in a university context.	Functions of code-switching by instructors in EFL classes, their views regarding the usage of code-switching in ESL classrooms, and CS in the EFL classroom.
Debreli (2016) Perceptions of non-native EFL teachers' on L1 Use in L2 classrooms: Implications for language program development	Investigating how and when L1 should be utilized in L2 classrooms.	The benefits of utilizing L1 while teaching English in foreign language contexts.
Tsagari and Diakou (2015) Students' and teachers' attitudes towards the use of	Investigate the attitudes and views of teachers and students as well as the ways in which they practice using L1 in EFL classroom.	The use of L1, teachers' attitudes.

the first language in the EFL
 State School Classrooms.

Ulfah et al., (2021)	Explore teachers' use of code-switching in EFL classroom instruction as well as their reasons for using code-switching.	Types of code-switching used by English teachers in foreign language classroom, the elements that lead English instructors to employ code-switching in the classroom, as well as the purposes for which it is used by English teachers.
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The following sections review the usage of L1 and a study of how first languages or L1 were used in EFL classrooms.

a. Receiving Instructions

One of the reasons L1 is used in the classroom is for instruction. Given that instruction is a crucial component of the classroom, research from [Debreli \(2016\)](#) emphasized how offering instructions in Turkish, their first language was improved effectiveness. It was what directs pupils, making lessons clear and easy to learn. It was necessary for students to comprehend what was expected of the teacher. If a task requires 10 minutes to complete but uses English, they were left in the dark in color, those 10 minutes would be squandered. In order for students to understand the topic from the beginning, which is the teaching part, this necessitates starting instruction in L1 from very beginning. According to research from [Puspawati \(2018\)](#), teachers frequently instruct students in L1. It was employed when reiterating queries and outlining goals. Many of the recordings of the teacher giving instructions in L1 that were played in class were typically replayed or provided directly to the students in L1 to make sure they understood what was expected of them at the time.

According to [Shabir \(2017\)](#) research, students put pressure on teachers to use L1, particularly when giving instructions for activities and grammar, control the classroom when needed, and teach new vocabulary by deriving its meaning. Lastly, the study by [Suhayati \(2018\)](#) highlights how teachers employ L1 since they do not want the knowledge, they gave pupils to be incomplete, and many historical events or situations demand them to do so. Additionally, it might be challenging for students to comprehend instructions when the teacher communicates in English. Teacher B indicated during the interview that L1 was utilized in discussion instructions when students had trouble expressing themselves in English. The teacher then gave them instructions in L1 for their responses in L1. [Pan and Pan \(2010\)](#) agreed that to make sure everyone knows what to do, alternatively, teachers might provide instructions in the TL and ask students to repeat them in the L1.

b. Understanding Difficult Topics

The fact that teachers were continuously looking for the simplest ways to impart challenging topics is a further issue. One technique employed was to use L1. According to [Debreli \(2016\)](#) research, teachers preferred to define challenging concepts for students in L1 and explain the content within, which is based on grammar that was far more advanced than before. This is because they are more aware of the fact that children comprehend a concept

when it taught in their first language (L1) as opposed to having to force them to study something they do not comprehend or that was untrue to the point where they accept fossilization. Interview excerpts demonstrate how teachers concerned that students could take in the subject or language content incorrectly since it was delivered in the language they are learning. L1 was employed by teachers and demonstrates positive student feedback, which results in future work of a significantly higher quality.

In research by [Shabir \(2017\)](#), it was shown that 60.0% of students agreed and 17.4% strongly agreed to utilize their first language to clarify grammatical concepts while understanding difficult topics/terms. They claimed that teachers of EFL used L1 to clarify complex grammar (complicated topics) and challenging terms in them. Additionally, it is revealed that 70% of teachers support the usage of L1 since it enables them to make sure that students comprehend and participate in class. research revealed that teachers had difficulty communicating in English with students when they were aware that the majority of them still had difficulty understanding it, especially when it came to the topics they were taught. As a result, the teacher often turns to L1 to help students understand topics that were difficult. Along with serving as a teaching aid and a component of classroom management, research from [Suhayati \(2018\)](#) indicated that the usage of L1 in the classroom focuses on explaining difficult subject matter as one of the indications. All these studies were related with Husain (1995), who argues that using L1 allows non-native speakers a quick and efficient approach to understand the grammatical structure of the target language.

c. Learning New Vocabularies

One of the key determinants L1 in the classroom usage was vocabulary, and this was a nearly expected outcome across studies, demonstrating that almost all studies also found this aspect to be important. [Debreli \(2016\)](#) highlighted the fact that teachers in his research found it was challenging to explain a vocabulary word's meaning when it was taught in the target language, therefore they had to utilize L1 to help students comprehend. It was noted that even after getting instruction in English, the majority of students still challenged. Even when L1, or Turkish, it was utilized in more complicated situations, it could still be challenging to grasp the solution, therefore many people ultimately consult dictionaries to determine what the vocabulary's true meanings are. Therefore, when instructions were presented in English, there was a greater potential that they would misinterpret.

According to research by [Suhayati \(2018\)](#), 73% of teachers concur that teaching vocabulary—especially vocabulary that has never been used before—to students was more effective when L1 is used. In a single instance from [Ulfah et al., \(2021\)](#), it was demonstrated how the teacher employs L1 when speaking English after abruptly switching to Indonesian. It was given in pronouncing the sentence, as quoted, “Students, do you know *luka bakar*?” which was where vocabulary that may be difficult for students to understand in English was mentioned in Indonesian for students to know more about the meaning of the statement in Indonesian as their L1. Based on the statement from [Lee \(2000\)](#) was in the line that students utilize L1 to affirm, rationalize, or predict unknown TL terms while dealing with vocabulary difficulties.

d. Socializing in the Classroom

According to the various studies cited, students were more inclined to express themselves in their first language while interacting with others in the classroom. Nurhamidah et al., (2018) discovered that when the teacher did not take or score the discussion which typically occurred when they reviewed group work given by the teacher—students spoke in L1. In this instance, it was clear that students struggle to communicate their thoughts, especially when they were aware of their restricted vocabulary. Debreli (2016) discovered that despite being a crucial component of English practice, socializing in the classroom was a topic that was frequently mentioned but never thoroughly examined. When it came to learning English, teachers socialize with their students exclusively in the context of fostering beneficial relationships and exchanging jokes especially for the purpose of learning.

Since many teachers were aware of how challenging it would be for students to understand jokes or greetings when using English, they frequently make jokes in class using L1. Similarly, L1 was employed because the teacher did not want her students to feel dissatisfied when she tried to foster positive relationships while continuing to class in English. Finally, Suhayati (2018) discovered in her research that teachers allowed students to utilize L1 to explain or express concepts that were difficult for them to express in English. These reviewed also support by the use of L1 was helpful for language learning in EFL context. Antón and Dicamilla (1999) stated it creates a cognitive and social environment and facilitate task completion where students can support one another as needed throughout the task

CONCLUSION

The outcomes of the present study showed that students had a favorable view toward the use of L1 in EFL classes. First language (L1) has four utilities in this regard: receiving instructions, understanding difficult topics, learning new vocabularies, and socializing in the classroom. The results also showed that it was successful and might be helpful to learn English as a foreign language to utilize L1 selectively and properly. Further research may investigate the effect or the perception of the usage of L1 in the EFL classroom as the current study's only objective was to know how it is used in a classroom environment.

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