

Multinational EFL Teachers Perspective of Using L1 in the L2 Classroom¹

*Ringphami Shimray², Prince of Songkla University International College,
Hat Yai Campus, Songkhla, Thailand*

Thinley Wangdi³, Walailak University, Tha Sala, Nakhonsithamarat, Thailand

Abstract

While some researchers claim that the use of the first language (L1) in second language (L2) classrooms should be discouraged since they say that success in learning an L2 is heavily determined by the maximum exposure to it, but others argue that the use of L1 is beneficial particularly in EFL classrooms. This study was conducted to investigate the beliefs of EFL language teachers in using L1 in the English classroom with the hope of providing new insight and evidence for the abovementioned theories on L1 use in L2 classrooms. A modified 5-Likert scale questionnaire and individual follow-up interview were used to collect the data. The participants were 47 foreign teachers teaching in a Thai EFL context. The data obtained using mixed-method study design revealed that the majority of teacher-participants felt that judicious use of L1 in the English classroom is useful for learners. The reported benefits of using L1 in L2 classrooms included improving the classroom environment, improving the outcome of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, a deeper understanding of the lesson, and bringing the positive relationship between teachers and students. However, a few participants argued that the use of L1 in L2 classrooms should be discouraged since it lessens the students' opportunities to listen and speak the target language.

Resumen

Mientras que algunos investigadores afirman que el uso de la primera lengua (L1) en las aulas de la segunda lengua (L2) debería desaconsejarse, ya que dicen que el éxito en el aprendizaje de una L2 está fuertemente determinado por la máxima exposición a ella, otros argumentan que el uso de L1 es particularmente beneficioso en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera. Este estudio se llevó a cabo para investigar las creencias de los profesores de idiomas EFL sobre el uso de L1 en el aula de inglés con la esperanza de proporcionar una nueva perspectiva y evidencia para las teorías mencionadas anteriormente sobre el uso de L1 en las aulas de L2. Para la recogida de datos se utilizó un cuestionario de escala Likert de 5 modificado y una entrevista individual de seguimiento. Los participantes fueron 47 profesores extranjeros que enseñaban en un contexto de EFL tailandés. Los datos obtenidos utilizando un diseño de estudio de método mixto revelaron que la mayoría de los docentes participantes sintieron que el uso juicioso de L1 en el aula de inglés es útil para los estudiantes. Los beneficios informados del uso de L1 en las aulas de L2 incluyeron la mejora del entorno del aula, la mejora del resultado del conocimiento del vocabulario y la gramática, una comprensión más profunda de la lección y una relación positiva entre maestros y estudiantes. Sin embargo, algunos participantes argumentaron que se debe desalentar el uso de L1 en las aulas de L2, ya que disminuye las oportunidades de los estudiantes para escuchar y hablar el idioma de destino.

Introduction

Teaching the English language in non-English speaking countries has always been a daunting task. It requires a lot of effort to be put in by both teachers and learners. As a result, there have been many research studies done by researchers and educators seeking the best possible teaching methodologies to help English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) learners. This has, however, led to a lot of conflict over teaching pedagogies and approaches among the researchers and educators. One of the ongoing debates among the researchers and educators in teaching non-English speaking students is the medium of instruction in the classroom, whether the use of students' first language (L1) in the foreign/second language (L2) classroom benefits learners to acquire language better or not (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Stapa & Majid, 2006, Wangdi & Shimray, 2022). While some researchers commented that the use of L1 in L2 classrooms should be discouraged as success in L2 achievement is heavily determined by the maximum exposure to the target language, others argue that the use of L1 is beneficial particularly in EFL classrooms (Debreli & Oyman, 2016).

Admittedly, much has been written on L1 use in L2 classrooms, and both the benefits and drawbacks of using L1 in the L2 classroom have been addressed in different contexts (e.g., Almohaimeed & Almurshed, 2018; Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Debreli, & Oyman, 2016; Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2017; Sevim & Turhanli, 2019; Shabir, 2017; Wongrak, 2017; Zulfikar, 2019), and even in the local EFL contexts (e.g., Nilubol & Sitthitikul, 2017; Wangdi & Shimray, 2022). However, literature, thus far, has revealed inconclusive findings, particularly on teachers' beliefs related to using L1 in L2 classrooms. Thus, this study was conducted to

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² aarnshimray@gmail.com

³ thinley11@gmail.com, 0000-0002-0811-0525, Correspondent

provide additional insight into this controversy. The belief is also that researchers and educators need an updated analysis of how teachers view the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom to meet the current demands of the education system (Shin et al., 2020). Furthermore, not many studies have attempted to examine the views of multinational EFL teachers on this problem. This was an added reason for undertaking this study.

English language in the context

The English language is one of the most used languages among the four to five thousand other languages around the globe (Akinwamide, 2012). It is the language of business, science, and education of the contemporary age that has undoubtedly cut across all international and national boundaries (Guilherme, 2007). This underlying ideology that sees English as a language of development and globalization has shaped the attitude of many non-native English-speaking countries on the English language. Many East Asian countries, including Thailand, have introduced several changes in their English language education policies and have made English one of the compulsory subjects (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017; Su, 2006).

In the Thailand context, English is learned as a foreign language. Although, worldwide, the number of English language users increases daily, it has always been challenging to master the English language for non-native English speakers (Mohammed, 2018). Thailand, in particular, has been suffering in meeting up the targeted benchmark of language proficiency. Therefore, Thais in general are dissatisfied with the perceived outcome of the education practice concerning English language learning (Baker & Jarunthawatchai, 2017). According to the 2010 TOEFL language proficiency test results, Thailand was ranked 116th out of 163 countries, which is very low (Noom-Ura, 2013). Also, in 2013, Thailand ranked 55th out of 60 by Education First (EF) English Proficiency Index, ranking, 'a very low proficiency' (Kaur et al., 2016).

Besides many factors that contribute to the failure of the English language in Thailand, some of the most common issues that exist in teaching and learning English in Thailand are a lack of opportunities for students to use the English language, inadequate skills of teachers in teaching English, and limited opportunities for students to speak English with native-English speakers (Noom-Ura, 2013). Also, Kaur et al. (2016) have pointed out that teaching in Thailand is heavily teacher-centered and exam-oriented where students are given limited hands-on opportunities to use their language knowledge. Another problem, directly related to the present study, is the medium of instruction used in the classroom. Khamkhien (2010) has highlighted that the use of Thai (L1) by Thai English teachers in teaching the English language is one reason why Thai learners could have possibly failed to learn the English language.

Teachers' beliefs

Recently, the study on teachers' beliefs has gained popularity among linguistic researchers (Shah, 2020). There are many studies conducted covering different aspects of teaching and learning through the teachers' perspective. This is mainly because understanding teachers' beliefs of any educational practices is believed to influence what teachers say in the classroom, how they understand new pedagogical information of teaching and learning, and finally how they develop their teaching practices in the classroom (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019; Johnson, 1994). Although some might argue that the study of teachers' beliefs is not a new topic to be researched, yet one cannot deny that teachers' beliefs are one of the key factors that impact teachers' conduct of classroom practice (Soleimani, 2020), which ultimately influences the students learning outcomes. For this reason, this study has attempted to investigate EFL English teachers' beliefs about using L1 in English classroom, and reasons behind them.

This study is needed because the use of L1 in L2 classrooms has long remained controversial among researchers and educators (Iswati & Hadimulyono, 2018). Some researchers claim that L1 use in teaching L2 languages has detrimental effects on language acquisition (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009). For instance, Krashen (1981) and Yphantides (2009) have strongly discouraged L1 use in L2 classrooms claiming that L2 learners should have maximum exposure to the target language to successfully acquire the target language. On the other hand, some experts support the use of L1 in L2 classrooms. Mart (2013), for example, asserted that the use of L1 in L2 classrooms is helpful for learners, as it provides a deeper understanding of the target language, better comprehension, and opportunities for learners to express themselves, and increases classroom interaction. The benefit of L1 use was further supported by Al-Alawi (2008), who claimed that the use of L1 in L2 classrooms saves classroom instructional time and avoids confusion among learners.

Related studies in the EFL context

In response to this growing controversy on the use of L1 in English classrooms, in recent years, there have been several studies conducted on this topic covering teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions to shed more light on this long-existing debate on whether L1 contributes to or hinders L2 acquisition. Recently,

Sevim and Turhanli (2019) investigated the university teachers' attitudes towards the use of L1 in their L2 classes. Eighteen teachers teaching English at the university in Turkey participated and responded to their questionnaire and semi-structured interview. In doing this, although the majority of participants had a slightly negative attitude towards the L1 use, many others suggested that judicious use of L1 in the L2 classroom was helpful, particularly when teaching grammar, new vocabulary, and solving disciplinary issues with the students. Likewise, Shabir (2017) conducted a study with student-teachers, training at the University of Queensland, Australia. A total of twenty-three local and international teachers, eighteen with prior teaching experience and five without participated in this study. The researcher reported that the student-teachers believed that a limited use of the L1 in L2 classrooms had a positive effect on language learning.

A study conducted by Mahmud (2018) in the Bangladeshi EFL context did not differ from the studies discussed thus far. Both Bangladeshi university students and teachers perceived the judicious use of L1 in the English classroom as a useful instructional medium in the classroom. The researchers pointed out that the use of L1 facilitated learners and encouraged them to focus on differences and similarities between their mother tongue and English language, and it provided learners with a deeper understanding of the target language.

Wongrak (2017) conducted a similar study with English language teachers teaching in Northeast Thailand by interviewing six lecturers. Analysis of the data was not so different from the studies discussed above. However, in contrast to what has been discussed so far, the researcher commented that their participants had overwhelming support for the use of L1 in L2 classrooms. They also pointed out that most of the participants knew the theoretical benefits and drawbacks of L1 use in L2 classes; however, their medium of instruction was driven by contextual constraint. Thus, they felt that the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom could benefit their students and help them learn a language better.

However, a study conducted in the Iranian EFL context slightly differs from Wongrak's (2017) findings. A total of twenty-five teachers and three hundred forty-five students from Guilan University, Rasht, Iran, completed a questionnaire and were interviewed. The Iranian students had a positive attitude towards the use of their L1 in English classes and teachers suggested that the use of English as a medium instruction could be beneficial in acquiring the target language. Hashemi and Sabet (2013) pointed out that their research showed that judicious use of L1 in the classroom may help students to lower their language learning anxiety. Al-Amir (2017) investigated Arabian EFL teachers' perspectives on the use of L1 in the English classroom. Thirty-one female teachers teaching English at Jeddah University, Saudi Arabia, responded to their questionnaire. The finding was in line with Shabir (2017) and Hashemi and Sabet (2013), albeit in different EFL contexts. The participants acknowledged that the careful use of L1 in L2 classrooms was a good practice to help learners in language acquisition.

Although the literature has revealed extensive discussions on the use of L1 in L2 classrooms in different EFL contexts, little is known about how EFL teachers, especially foreigners teaching in Thailand feel about the use of L1 (Thai in particular) in English language classrooms. Therefore, this study investigated teachers' beliefs related to using L1 in the English classroom. The study is important both in the Thai context, and beyond it because the beliefs that teachers have on the relative benefits and drawbacks of using L1 in the English language classroom is still a matter of debate. Also, little is known about the beliefs of foreign teachers teaching in Thailand. Thus, with a hope of shedding more light on this controversy, this study sought to answer the following research questions.

Research questions

1. What do foreign English-speaking teachers teaching in the Thai EFL context believe about using student's L1 in English classes?
2. What are the perceived benefits of using L1 in the English classroom?

Method

This study used a mixed concurrent equal status design (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Both quantitative and qualitative data had equal weight. A mixed-method design was adopted for the present study because it is new and one of the promising research methods developed and used in educational research fields to strengthen the single research designs (quantitative and qualitative) (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Moreover, this kind of method that involves qualitative and quantitative phases is believed to help uncover a deeper understanding of the research conducted, as they expand explanatory power by complimenting each other (Riazi & Candlin, 2014). Accordingly, a modified five-level Likert scale questionnaire for quantitative

and a semi-structured interview for qualitative data were used as instruments to collect the data. The details of instruments are given in the instrument and data collection section.

Participants

This study employed convenience and snow-balling sampling techniques to recruit the participants. English teachers from universities, colleges, and schools were invited to participate in this study through different channels (e.g., mailing, messaging, and personal contact), along with the help of the co-researcher and colleagues. Soon after their consent to participate in this study, researchers administered electronic questionnaire (*Google Forms*) to collect the data. All teachers were given an option not to participate if they were not comfortable. The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews after getting the consent of the participants. In doing so, of the 47 teachers (22 males and 25 females) who agreed to complete the questionnaire, 14 (nine males and five females) volunteered for the follow-up interview. The interview was conducted by the researchers using *Zoom* and was recorded for the analysis. The responses were transcribed and summarized in the result section. Each interview lasted for 15-30 minutes, and interviews ended when interviewees/participants had nothing more to add.

This study analyzed the responses from native and non-native English-speaking teachers teaching at schools (70.2%), colleges (12.8%), and universities (17%) in Thailand. A total of 47 teachers (three native and forty-four non-native teachers) aged 23 to 46 years old, teaching in Thailand from different countries (e.g., Bhutan, England,, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and the USA) with varying years of teaching experiences voluntarily participated in this study. The participants spoke English and their respective L1. The demographic information of the participants is illustrated in Table 1.

Details	Participants	Percentage
Nationalities		
American	2	4.3%
British	3	6.4%
Bhutanese	7	14.9%
Indonesian	2	4.2%
Indian	8	17%
Filipino	25	53.2%
Teaching experiences		
Less than 5 years	24	51.1%
6-10 years	16	34%
11-15 years	4	8.5%
16-20 years	1	2.1%
More than 20 years	2	4.3%

Table 1 Participants of this study

Instruments and data collection

The instruments used for this study were a five-level Likert scale questionnaire adapted from Wach and Monroy (2020) and a semi-structured interview, which was adopted from Al-Alawi (2008). A few modifications were done to both questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions based on the current research design and context. The reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) of the questionnaire adapted was .720. However, to further confirm its reliability with modified questionnaire items, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated with the final 18 items; four demography questions and fourteen questions ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5 on L1 use in L2 classroom to investigate teacher's perspective. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the modified questionnaire tested with 15 random participants was .852, which is good (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Since the data was collected during the pandemic, researchers prepared a questionnaire using *Google Forms*. Likewise, the semi-structured interviews were done through *Zoom*.

Data analysis

As this study was interested in examining the teachers' belief of L1 use in L2 classes using data obtained from quantitative and qualitative methods, the following statistical methods were used.

1. The demographic information of the forty-seven respondents was gathered using descriptive analysis in terms of age, gender, nationalities, and teaching experience to provide a clear picture of the respondents.

2. The descriptive analysis, such as percentage, mean, median, and standard deviation, was carried out to answer the first and second research questions to see the foreign English teachers' beliefs. To gain further understanding, a comparison was made between male and female teachers' beliefs.

3. In the qualitative phase, collected using semi-structured interviews, the responses were recorded, and then transcribed and summarized to examine the third research question. Data coding involved a bottom-up approach that included data coding, axial coding, and data labeling (Charmaz, 2014).

Results

Quantitative findings

The questionnaire findings on the teacher respondents' beliefs of L1 use in L2 classrooms were descriptively analyzed using percentage, mean, standard deviation, and tabulated in three categories strongly disagree/disagree, neutral, agree/strongly. The finding is presented in Table 2.

Item	Scale	n	%	M	SD
1 In the language classroom, it is best if pre-learning activities are explained in L1.	D	17	36.1	3.28	1.34
	N	5	10.6		
	A	25	53.3		
2 It is a good idea to give instructions (about exercises, activities, and homework, etc.) in L1 if learners have a low proficiency level in English.	D	14	29.8	3.53	1.41
	N	2	4.2		
	A	31	66		
3 A teacher who uses only English in class is less approachable than one who uses both L1 and English.	D	17	36.2	3.19	1.22
	N	6	12.8		
	A	24	51		
4 The classroom atmosphere is likely to be more friendly if the teacher uses L1 at least sometimes.	D	8	17	3.68	.95
	N	4	8.5		
	A	35	74.5		
5 It is better to use L1 to keep discipline in the classroom.	D	22	46.9	2.94	1.07
	N	6	12.8		
	A	19	40.3		
6 Especially at lower levels, learners feel less anxious in a classroom where L1 use is allowed.	D	6	12.7	3.51	.83
	N	12	25.5		
	A	29	61.8		
7 At least some L1 is necessary for teaching English to lower-level students.	D	5	10.6	3.77	.86
	N	3	6.4		
	A	39	82		
8 Translating English words into L1 is a good way to remember vocabulary in English.	D	5	10.6	3.83	.94
	N	4	8.5		
	A	38	80.9		
9 In the English classroom translating most new vocabulary into L1 is the best option.	D	13	27.6	3.36	1.15
	N	4	8.5		
	A	30	63.9		
10 Comparing L1 and English grammar is a good way to understand English grammar.	D	9	19.1	3.43	1.09
	N	10	21.3		
	A	28	59.6		
11 Comparing and contrasting L1 and English grammatical structures is an effective teaching technique.	D	12	25.5	3.17	1.02
	N	15	31.9		
	A	20	32.6		
12 When teaching lower-level learners, it is best if the teacher explains English grammar rules in L1.	D	8	17.1	3.43	.97
	N	13	27.7		
	A	26	55.2		
13 If learners have problems with understanding texts in English (in reading and listening), translating them into L1 is a good solution.	D	9	19.2	3.60	.10
	N	4	8.5		
	A	34	72.3		
14 It is better for lower proficiency learners if their textbooks contain explanations in L1.	D	21	44.7	3.04	1.14
	N	5	10.6		
	A	21	44.7		

Note: Scales: strongly disagree = 1; disagree = 2; Neutral/hard to say = 3; agree = 4; strongly agree = 5. Key: D = (strongly disagree & disagree); N (Neutral); A = (strongly agree & agree).

Table 2: Frequencies and descriptive statistics of the questionnaire items

As illustrated in Table 2, the majority (82%) of respondents agreed that the use of L1 would be beneficial. They pointed out that the use of L1 could help reduce language anxiety (Item 6), particularly with lower-level students (Item 7). They agreed that L1 use would be helpful for learners to improve their understanding of the target language (Item 13). Moreover, responses to items 1 and 2 revealed the surprising fact that even teachers who cannot speak L1 of the context felt that pre-learning activities and classroom instruction

should be explained in the students' L1 Teachers also believed that with L1 use in the classroom, students would feel more comfortable leading to a friendlier classroom atmosphere (Items 3 and 4); however, the majority disagreed that the use of L1 would be helpful to solve student's disciplinary problems (Item 5). In relation to learning, teachers agreed that vocabulary could be learned better if teachers adopted a kind of code-switching between L1 and target language (Item 9). More so, it seemed they strongly believed that alternating L1 and target language could help improve learners' vocabulary retention (Item 8). Most teachers believed that comparing and contrasting English grammar rules with those of the L1 could be an effective teaching technique to learn English grammar (Items 10, 11, and 12). Furthermore, they also believe that having an L1 explanation incorporated in the target language textbook would be helpful (Item 14).

Qualitative findings

The qualitative phase of the present study aimed at investigating the underlying rationales behind the participants' beliefs about the use of L1 in the English classroom. Based on the significance and objective of this study, the data were discussed thematically to supplement quantitative findings. The sub-themes include "judicious use of the L1 facilitates language learning," "the use of L2 as a medium of instruction gives learners a greater exposure," and "the use of L1 improves classroom environment."

Judicious use of the L1 facilitates language learning

Most participants stressed that the judicious use of the L1 in the L2 classroom could help learners to enhance their language learning. They pointed out that the use of L1 in teaching L2 languages could promote inclusivity and avoid misunderstanding. Some responses from the participants in the interviews are given below.

L1 is most useful at the beginning and low levels. Using L1 in English classrooms helps students to learn new languages. Teachers can use L1 to elicit students' previous knowledge in L1 and discuss it in the target language. This may benefit students to learn the language more productively. (T7)

Not all learners can learn in the same approach. A mixed-language learning approach can promote inclusivity and avoid misunderstanding. (T4)

Particular emphasis was given to learning vocabulary and grammar. Although some participants had no clue of students' L1 (Thai), they still felt that L1 mixture with L2 may help learners ease target language acquisition through better retention of vocabulary and grammar.

L1 Mixture with L2 is great. Once in a while, when they are suffering from understanding a particular thing (e.g., grammar or vocabulary), L1 can be used. But for me, as I don't speak Thai, no matter how painful it is for the students to understand (my) English, I have no choice but to use English all the time. (T13)

The participants also commented that translating words from the target language into students' L1 could give them a better understanding of the lesson taught.

Mixture with L2 dominance. Most of the time, the students that are slow learners need the translation of the vocabulary words in L1 to comprehend the lesson. However, if you are teaching a group of students who are advanced in English, teaching them with L2 only is advisable. (T5)

However, most of the participants suggested that the L2 should be the medium of instruction in the classroom. They stated that the learners should be given more exposure to the target language for better language acquisition but that the use of only the L2 could be stressful for students and result in misunderstandings about the concepts being taught.

English teachers should use a mixture with L2 dominance because, if you only focus L1 as a channel of instruction, the learners tend to just rely on their teachers, they will not try to explore by themselves because they know that they will be spoon-fed. Furthermore, exposing them to English as a medium of instruction will help them improve their language skills. (T9)

The use of L2 as medium of instruction gives learners a greater exposure

A few of the teachers expressed their reluctance to recognize the benefits of L1 use in L2 classrooms. They believed that teachers should be discouraged from using the L1, as this might limit the opportunity for them to immerse themselves into the target language.

L2 only, if the students are taught using L1, immersion learning cannot take place. And we believe that learning takes place better with immersion, meaning if learners get better or more exposure to the target language. I feel like language acquisition can take place faster. For the Thai context, this may be the core reason why Thai students still lag in terms of English language proficiency. (T11)

Moreover, they commented that only the use of L2 in the classroom can motivate the students to speak and help them become familiarized with the words and sounds of the target language. However, they suggested that when teachers use only L2 as a medium of instruction, they should use simple language to make the lesson understandable.

If L1 is given importance the students will not try to communicate in English during the class. The teacher can use only limited L1, so that the students feel that they have to speak in English to make the teacher understand. (T10)

Teaching L2 only inside the classroom could help the student's listening skills, and they would be familiarized with English sounds. It would help the students to adjust their cognitive learning to learn new information. (T14)

The use of L1 improves the classroom environment

Although in response to the classroom environment, many of them in the quantitative data expressed the belief that the classroom environment could be made friendlier through the use of the L1, some teachers expressed their reservations about this belief. They argued that the L1 would not necessarily be needed in the English classroom to make the classroom environment more friendly, rather that would be more dependent on the teacher's ability to teach and their teaching methods.

Obviously, teachers who speak Thai (L1) would be more approachable to the students. Not only Thai students but students, in general, will also be comfortable with the teacher who speaks their language. With that said, I think it has less to do with the classroom atmosphere. To me classroom atmosphere can be improved by implementing proper teaching methods, or if it's more student-centered based. (T6)

Being able to speak in the L1 does not make classes easier or teachers more approachable. Oftentimes, it matters much more about the teacher and teaching methods rather than what language they can speak. (T8)

Discussion

This study investigated the belief of foreign teachers (both native and non-native English speakers) with different cultural backgrounds, ages and experiences teaching in Thai EFL context on the use of student's L1 (Thai) in English classrooms. Accordingly, the reasons behind their belief were also examined.

The responses to most of the items were consistent and the general pattern of responses remained predictable, as many of the participants had common and fixed beliefs. They believed that judicious use of the L1 in EFL classrooms was beneficial to a certain extent (Al-Amir, 2017; Wangdi & Shimray, 2022). One of the primary driving forces behind their beliefs was avoiding misunderstanding and promoting a deeper understanding of the lesson with L1 usage (Al-Alawi, 2008; Mart, 2013). Another was being able to sustain conducive learning, justifying it with a statement that students are more comfortable with teachers who speak their L1 (Shabir, 2017). In other words, they felt that teachers who speak L1 could be more approachable to the students. As noted by Lucha and Berhanu (2015), when teachers are approachable and hospitable, it improves the classroom learning environment because students actively participate in classroom activities, discussions, and other communicative activities. However, some of the participants in the present study expressed their reservations in improving the learning environment with the L1 in the L2 classroom; rather they argued that one needs to use effective and appropriate teaching methods to create a conducive classroom environment.

This study revealed the opinion of many of the participants that the use of L1 in English classrooms was a helpful approach to teach vocabulary and grammar (Sevim & Turhanli, 2019; Wangdi & Shimray, 2022), the most crucial aspects of language acquisition (Wangdi, 2020). In the interview, most participants expressed that translating English words into L1 and explaining English grammar rules in L1 might result in a better outcome. However, others in the interview expressed the opinion that the use of the L1 should be discouraged because learners need maximum opportunity to immerse themselves in the target language (Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014). Participants commented that L2 only is good for language learners because it helps them become familiarized with pronunciation, improve listening skills, and more importantly give learners a need to speak L2 while conversing with teachers. They felt that the medium of instruction should be only in the target language to produce a greater impact on language learners. This argument is, in fact, supported by Murray and Wigglesworth (2005), who claimed that L2 only in the classroom, especially in the EFL context, is the most effective form of language learning. Likewise, Krashen (1981) and Ellis and Wells (1980) clearly stated that language learners should be given maximum exposure to the target language for better acquisition.

The current study provided findings that were consistent with previous research studies conducted in EFL context (e.g., Al-Amir, 2017; Hashemi & Sabet, 2013; Mahmud, 2018; Sevim & Turhanli, 2019; Shabir, 2017; Wongrak, 2017). Most importantly, this study has managed to shed more light on the use of L1 in L2

classes with a clear justification from unique participants-- multinational EFL teachers with little or no knowledge of the L1 of their teaching context. Thus, this study has helped bridge the gap and provided updated information about the belief of foreign language teachers about using L1 in the English classroom. The findings are particularly important for the contexts where foreign teachers (native and non-native English speakers) are being hired to teach English. Although it is apparent that foreign teachers are being hired with an expectation to give greater exposure to the target language for better and speedier language acquisition, as pointed earlier, educational stakeholders and policymakers should understand that L2 only in the classroom may not work unless learners possess high language proficiency, and more so, many research studies, as well as the present study, have suggested that judicious use of L1 or L1 mixed with L2 dominance as a better option of a medium of instruction for the language development, especially with students with low language proficiency level. Therefore, educational stakeholders and policymakers of similar contexts are suggested to consider careful and extensive literature reading before implementing policy on the medium of instruction in classrooms. This study argues that there is no harm in using L1 in the English classroom if used appropriately and when needed.

Conclusion

Several lessons can be learned from the present study. Firstly, be it local or foreign language teachers, earlier literature, as well as this study, revealed that there is no definitive opinion on whether L1 should be used in English classrooms. Many of the participants perceived that a judicious use of L1 is always beneficial. However, it was suggested not to overuse it since language could be acquired more effectively if learners are given more exposure to it. Secondly, although it seems possible that the classroom environment could be improved through the use of L1, some participants suggested a teachers' pedagogical techniques could also make the same difference. A further study on this aspect might shed more light on the above argument. Thirdly, in line with Sevim and Turhanli (2019), teachers felt that L1 in EFL classrooms might be helpful to teach vocabulary and grammar to the students. They felt that translating and comparing L1 with L2 may have a positive transfer of knowledge of the target language (Mahmud, 2018; Shuchi & Islam, 2016). Also, although this study revealed that there seems to be no harm in using L1 in the English classroom, teachers are suggested to use it only to explain something complex, when and where they feel that the lesson is beyond students' comprehensibility. Furthermore, although the study found that learning anxiety can be reduced to a certain extent with L1, most of the present teachers disagreed that the L1 in L2 classrooms could be helpful for class control and discipline. They pointed out that it depends on the teacher's teaching abilities, techniques, and methods. This was also confirmed by a study conducted Wangdi and Namgyel (2022), where they found that teachers play a critical role in controlling students' disruptive behaviors in the classroom.

Finally, as in any other studies, we acknowledge that this study has some limitations. The sample size was small and data was collected only from the teachers we could reach personally through our acquaintances. Conducting the same study with a larger sample size could strengthen the interpretation of the perceived similarities and differences among the language teachers. Also, since the present study was conducted in the Thai EFL context where students' English proficiency is relatively low, further study in different EFL contexts with different English proficiencies could also be useful. It would be of interest to investigate whether EFL teachers dealing with high English proficiency students have a similar perspective about using L1 in the English classrooms.

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