

Teachers' and Pupils' Attitudes and Practices towards the Use of Mother Tongue in EFL Teaching

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Abstract:

Learning is claimed to be better with fruitful results when conducted within the learners' variety. However, when it comes to teaching EFL, most teachers tend to use only that language in the classroom. But, in reality, they face problems related to communicating with their learners. This research paper aims at investigating EFL teachers' attitudes and practices towards the use of L1 in EFL teaching in an Algerian context at middle schools. The sample of the study consists of 70 participants; including 40 pupils and 30 English teachers from different middle schools in Tlemcen. The data collected were both qualitatively and quantitatively analysed. The results obtained reveal that both teachers and learners have positive attitudes towards using L1 in the English class, because it is considered as an auxiliary tool for them. The results also show that a wise use of L1 in the class facilitates EFL learning, and helps both teachers and learners to cope with difficult or new tasks, to motivate learners and to facilitate teacher-learner communication.

Keywords: Mother tongue; Dialect; EFL teaching; Variety; Attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Using L1 to teach EFL has been a topic of discussion among researchers for a long period of time. In addition, despite the fact that using L1 in EFL teaching is considered as unfavourable method, it can be a solution in some situations when communication breaks down. This can be found in the early stages of EFL learning. However, it must be governed by some rules so that it does not lead to the overuse. In this context, (Atkinson, 1987) stated that the key for the teacher seems to be using L1 appropriately and avoiding the overuse which will make learners feel that they cannot comprehend the input of the

FL until it is translated into their L1. Accordingly, (**Schweers, 1999**) and (**Nation, 2003**) claimed that the appropriate use of the L1 in the classroom can be very beneficial.

Because of the huge research done in the field of foreign language acquisition, it can be noticed that there is a consensus among language teachers about using the target language maximally in language classrooms (**Scott & de la Fuente, 2008**). However, nowadays, a more tolerant attitude towards L1 exploitation can be noticed (Gulzar, 2010).

It can be observed that the phenomenon of ‘code switching’, which (**Richards and Schmidt, 2002, p. 81**) described as “a change by a speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another one” has always been a hot topic for debate. In this context, there was a contradiction among scholars about the use of L1; some of them (Anton & Dicamilla, 1999; Cook, 2001; Çelik, 2008; de la Colina & Mayo, 2009; Gabrielatos, 2001; Huerta-Macias & Kephart, 2009; Jingxia, 2010; Kahraman, 2009; Scott & de la Fuente, 2008) support the idea claiming that an optimal amount of L1 can be used as an essential pedagogical tool. While others (**Sarıçoban, 2010; Turnbull, 2001**) were against its use.

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The use of students’ L1 in FLT was discouraging for many years (**Cook, 2001**). The main objective of EFL teaching was not cross-lingual, but was rather mono-lingual or intra-lingual (**Cook, 2001**). The predominant method of teaching was the direct method which did not support the use of comparative analysis between the learners’ L1 and the FL, and the lessons were L1 free. Similarly, the translation method was also avoided in EFL classes because it had a pejorative overtone and obstructed the process of learning. However, in the recent years, researchers have recognized the importance of comparative analysis between MT and the FL and that the goal of FL is not to substitute the students’ L1. In this context, (**Cook, 2001**) concluded that translation provides an easy avenue to enhance linguistic awareness. Therefore, a move to the linguistic interdependence hypothesis has recently occurred (**Cummins, 2007 Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009**). However, although this shift received a welcoming attitudes from teachers to the use of students’ MT in teaching, there remains an unresolved issue concerning, as (**Turnbull,**

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2001, p. 536) named, 'the judicious and principled use' of mother tongue, since teachers often feel guilty for losing the path of teaching using only FL and feel that the use of MT is professionally inappropriate (**Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Swain, Kirkpatrick, & Cummins, 2011**). Thus, there was a split in the views of scholars about using the MT in FLT.

Arguments Supporting the Use of MT in EFL Teaching

The use of students' MT in EFL classes has been discussed with a variety of languages and mainly relates to the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, to universal principles of foreign language acquisition, and multi-linguistic models. Researches on the transfer between the L1 and the EFL reveal a linguistic interdependence (**Jessner & Cenoz, 2000**) with regard to multiple subsystems (phonological, syntactic, semantic, and textual) within the MT and FL systems (**Herdina & Jessner, 2002**). (**Bouvy, 2000**) supported the theory of crosslinguistic transfer with regard to literacy skills.

In addition, other scholars stated that the MT catalyzes the intake process of the FL (**e.g., Ellis, 1994**), as well as saves time and enhances understanding (**Turnbull, 2001**). (**Cook, 2002, p. 23**) also claimed that "given the appropriate environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs."

In this context, (**Ahmed and Jusoff, 2009**) attribute a compensating role to L1 for students with low language proficiency. In the same line of thought, (**Gulzar, 2010, p38**) conducted a survey concluding that the use of L1 in bilingual education can be seen as legitimate behaviour since a monolingual policy may lead to misperceptions, and as a consequence "educators, course developers, and teachers misunderstand language processes and cannot devise classroom strategies based on the appropriate use of languages".

Accordingly, (**Sampson, 2011, p.10**) supported the idea of Gulzar through his study on code-switching, in that his results show that first language has communicative functions in classrooms, including "expressing equivalence, discussing procedural concerns, floor holding, reiterating concepts, and forming group relationships".

However, Copland and Neokleous conclude that there are contradictions between the actions and beliefs of the teachers because bilingual teachers have a sense of guilt when they teach L2 with L1. Additionally, (Edstrom, 2006)' reflective report supported the possible benefits of L1, this was shown through her own classroom practices: giving grammar instructions, managing classroom, and compensating problems related to student comprehension.

Correspondingly, through an attitude survey conducted by McMillan and Rivers (2011), which buttresses the positive role of L1 in the sense that it has the power to enhance cognition, communication and social functions in language classrooms. Similarly, Anton and Dicomilla (1999) support the view that the use of L1 helps learners to set up supportive collaboration among friends.

Furthermore, researchers list some psycho-linguistic arguments which support and defend their views on the use of MT in EFL teaching, these are:

1. Teacher's use of the MT cannot present a threat to FL acquisition because learners already have a language basis from their MT. Consequently, learners are more socially developed and have more short-term memory capacity and more maturity when they become acquainted with the FL (Cook, 2002). Therefore, there is no competition between their MT and FL.
2. The belief in the 20th century was that the MT and the FL make distinct systems in the brain (Blakeslee, 1992). However, evidence shows that languages are interwoven in the brain in vocabulary, syntax, phonology, and pragmatics. Therefore, FL teaching should match the invisible processes in the brain and should not be separated from the MT, assuming that the ability to transfer between languages (code-switch) is a normal psycho-linguistic process (Cook, 1996; 1997).
3. The process of foreign language acquisition involves cognitive, social, and emotional factors that are inseparable and equally related to the MT and the FL.

Arguments against the Use of MT in FLT

Although there are some arguments which support the use of students' MT in FL teaching, there are other arguments against using it, the latter are of pedagogical nature. In this line of thought, Turnbull

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(2001), in his response to Cook (2001), points that students do not benefit when teachers over-rely on using the MT, particularly when the EFL teacher is the only linguistic model and main source of FL input. Accordingly, (McDonald, 1993) claimed that classroom situations can create various experiences for students such as real-life situations through simulations, he added that if the teacher uses the MT to a great extent, students may lose the chance to benefit from these situations.

Additionally, Ellis (1994) mentioned that teachers who overuse and depend mostly on the MT prevent their learners from an important language process in which students try to understand what is being said in class. Thus, using only FL in class increases students' achievements and proficiency in FL because of the experiences they gain in class. In addition to the pedagogical factors, supporters of the monolingual principle favour the compartmentalized language pedagogy that inhibits the interdependent nature of the MT and the FL. Thus, they see that using MT in FLT is an inhibitive factor.

In this context, Kayaoğlu, Öztürk and DağAkbaş (2010, p. 401) described the use of L1 in EFL teaching, stating that:

For a long time, many generations of EFL teachers adopted the principle to avoid the use of L1 in EFL classes as much as possible. Some have gone to the extent to say that they feel guilty and like they are betraying good language teaching practices when they have to use L1 in classroom. Moreover, the use of L1 was or has been associated with inadequacy and lack of expertise in language teaching. So it is to be avoided.

Accordingly, in history of teaching EFL, Howatt (1984) reflects three main assumptions of the monolingual principle in FLT, which are:

- a) FLT should be done exclusively in the FL;
- b) translation between the MT and the FL should be avoided;

c) in bilingual programmes, the two languages should be kept separate.

Besides, an immoderate dependence on MT may develop a feeling on the learners that now a single word cannot be understood without translation. As a result, they oversimplify to the degree of using inaccurate translation, such as the case of using L1 while speaking to the teacher even when they are capable of expressing what they want in English. This also leads them to fail to understand that in some classroom situations, it is necessary to use only English while communicating.

There are many other arguments against using MT in FL classes, since it leads to confusion between the students' MT and FL in terms of the three aspects of language: lexis, structure and context. Also, it prohibits the learners from developing their thinking in the FL and misguides them to believe that expressions in their MT and FL correspond to each other.

ELT Situation in Algeria

The linguistic situation in Algeria is described as a complex and rich topic that worth studying. In this context, Medjahed (2011, p. 73) uses the term '*linguistic plurality or diversity*' to describe the situation. Thus, Algeria is regarded as a particular Arab nation which has a variety of languages used and taught either in academic or non-academic contexts. MSA is used as the national language, Algerian Arabic and Berber are used in informal daily life communication, French is considered as the first foreign language, while English is seen as the second foreign language. Ephraim and Tabor (1987, p. 63-79) described the situation as:

The Algerian situation is complex as it is a crossroad of tensions between French language, classical Arabic versus colloquial Algerian Arabic and the various Berber dialects versus Arabic. The lessons from the Algerian situation may be usefully applied to analogous situations by state planning their linguistic, educational, and cultural policies.

Furthermore, the globalization process resulted some worldwide changes which have imposed educational reforms as an essential tool

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for human development. And therefore, there was a global and predominant language which was widely used for international communication, and lessened the domination of French; this language was 'English'. Because of that, Algeria has tried to cope with the new challenges by assigning additional roles to the ELT in various domains. This was by introducing basic reforms which aim at improving the teaching corps, reformulating the pedagogic approach, as well as implementing certain measures to boost the scientific research. As far as ELT is concerned, different teaching methods and approaches have been used, such as the Structuralist Approach, the Communicative Approach, and the Competency-based Approach.

During the 1990s, more importance was given to ELT and English was learnt from the 8th year in middle school to the 3rd year in secondary school. But, this did not result as expected because of many reasons, and therefore radical changes have been introduced in education during the beginning of 2000, and English was taught from the 1st year in middle school until the 3rd year in secondary school, which makes a set of 07 years study of English before the learners pass their baccalaureate exam.

Method and tools

The work at hand is an exploratory study taking place in different middle schools in Tlemcen. The data were gathered from thirty teachers and forty pupils. The teachers are both males and females with teaching experience exceeding five years. All of them are teachers of English at different middle schools, and they teach different levels. The pupils, on the other hand, also males and females, are learners from different levels at middle school. It is to be mentioned that both teachers and pupils share the same mother tongue which is 'Dialectal Arabic' and English represent a foreign language to them.

Two research instruments were used, namely questionnaires with EFL teachers and pupils, in addition to an audio-taped live lessons. Questionnaires were designed to explore both teachers' and pupils' attitudes towards using L1 in EFL classroom, to discover if they use it, when and why they use it. Both questionnaires composed of two sections. The first section is related to the informants' background information. The second section aims to investigate the respondents'

attitudes towards using L1 during EFL classes. Also, an audio-taped live lessons was also used to discover the time spent by both teachers and pupils in using L1 during an English class.

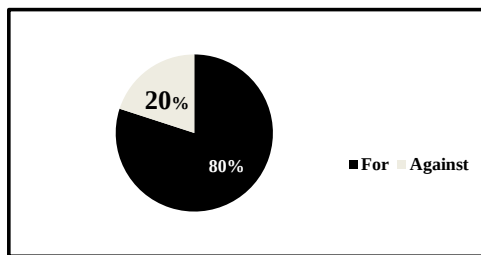
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As stated above, the research instruments were used to investigate teachers' and pupils' attitudes and practices towards the use of L1 in EFL classes. The results would elicit if this linguistic behavior is valid and practical in the Algerian context.

Teachers' Questionnaire Results

In response to the question about the use of L1 in EFL classes, 80% of the participants agreed with that, while 20% are against.

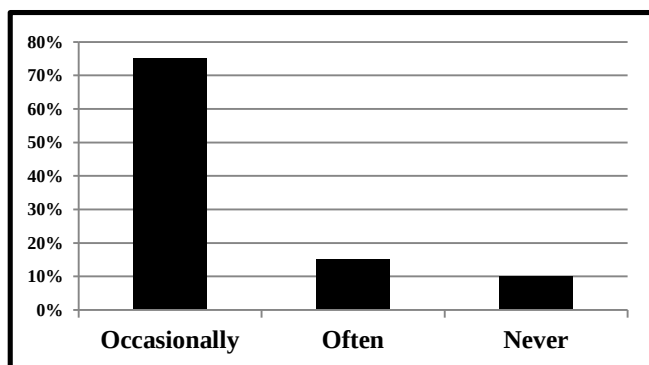
Figure.1. Teachers' Attitudes about the Use of L1 in Class



With regard to the next question, most teachers (75%) declared they use L1 occasionally in the English class. They said that there are some situations where communication breaks down and they find themselves obliged to use L1 to facilitate communication. On the other hand, 10% of the participants claimed that they never use L1 during an English lesson, while the remaining teachers (15%) stated that they often use it.

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Figure.2. Teachers' Use of L1 in the Classroom



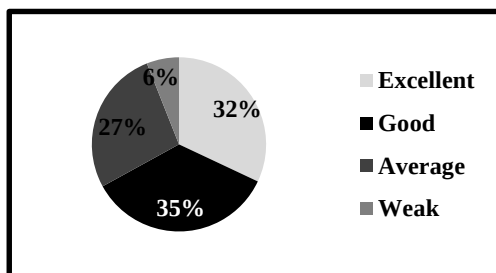
The majority of teachers (75%) declared that they allow their pupils to use L1 during the English class to achieve some functions including; understanding an instruction, explaining a grammatical point, and giving general meaning of an abstract English words and context. Besides, 25% said that they do not allow their learners to use L1.

Concerning the question which evaluates the reasons for using L1, the teachers list some reasons which may be classified into 4 main categories including; **a)** pedagogical implications such as organizing tasks, questions and instructions, and explaining grammar rules, **b)** cross-cultural perspectives (defining and explaining abstract words and new vocabulary, giving examples, comparing L1 and L2 aspects of language, and reinforcing the bilingual competence), **c)** managerial actions (gaining time and managing the class, drawing students' attention and motivating them), **d)** interpersonal teacher/student relationships (overcoming communicative difficulties in the class, facilitating teacher-student communication and relationships, and reducing classroom anxiety).

Students' Questionnaire Results

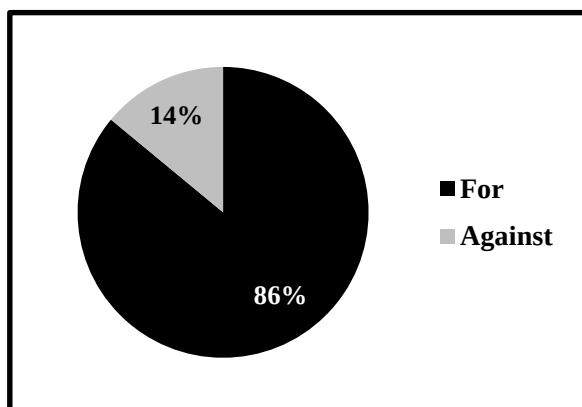
The study involved 40 middle school pupils, half of whom are boys and the other half girls. Results show that 32% of the participants believe they are excellent in English, while 35% declare having a good level. Besides, 27% declared they have an average level in the English language, while the remaining 6% are weak.

Figure.3. Participants' Level in English



With regard to the use of L1 in the English class, the majority of the respondents (86%) are in favour of using it, whereas only 14% are against.

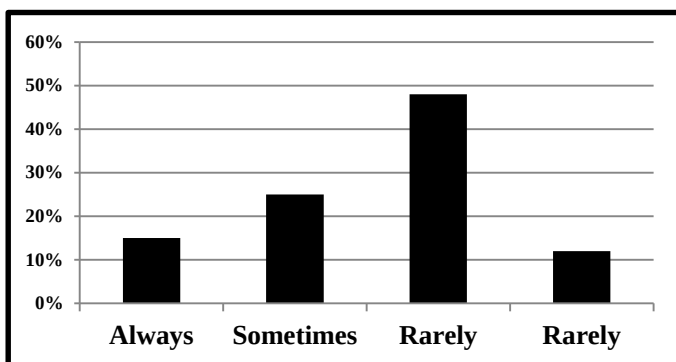
Figure.4. Pupils' Attitudes about the Use of L1 in Class



Accordingly, those who support the use of L1 in the English class declare that it helps them in learning and improving their level in the English language. Nearly half of the sample (48%) said that they rarely use L1 during English lesson; some of them (25%) stated they sometimes use it in some occasions. Finally, 15% declared that they always use it, while 12% never use it.

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Figure.5. Pupils' Use of L1 in the Classroom



Regarding the situations where the pupils prefer their teacher to use L1, the participants summarized them in the following points:

- explaining difficult grammar rules;
- comparing L1 and L2 aspects of language;
- reinforcing the bilingual competence;
- helping the pupils individually and correcting their errors;
- overcoming communicative difficulties in the classroom;
- reducing classroom anxiety.

On the other hand, the pupils would like their teachers to allow them to use L1 when speaking with their classmates about the lessons or something they did not understand, and when they face comprehension problems or do not find appropriate words to express their ideas.

Audio-Taped Lesson's results

The table above shows the time of using Arabic in an English class by both teachers and pupils. It indicates that much time spent by teacher is devoted to the 2nd year. The reason behind the use of L1 may be, as they declared, due to the complexity of the programme and that it contains complex grammatical and abstract words. Therefore, the teachers find themselves obliged to switch to L1 when communication breaks down.

Results also revealed that first year students use Arabic much time which might be due to the fact that English is a new language for them introduced in the middle school.

Table.1. Audio-Taped Lesson

School Grades	Teacher's Time (Minutes)	Student's Time (Minutes)
1st Year	10	20
2nd Year	14	15
3rd Year	8	10
4th Year	6	7

It was seen that the majority of the participants have positive attitudes towards the use of L1 while teaching English in the sense that this code switching could be of help for both learners and teachers. These findings support Cook's (2001) criterion of 'learning', which indicates that teachers' attitudes may derive from their experience that using the MT in EFL classes enhance learning.

The participants declared that using L1 mainly for some situations such as giving instructions, eliciting information, and fulfilling communication gap and bridging gap connection of complex activity interaction. Also, they reported that L1 is beneficial to explain some difficult grammar points, reinforcing the bilingual competence and to reduce the classroom anxiety and create a supportive classroom atmosphere. These results support the findings of a many scholars in the field, such as de la Campa and Nassaji (2009), Gulzar (2010), Copland and Neokleous (2011), in addition to Cook's (2001) criterion of efficiency, indicating that some topics can be taught more effectively through comparisons to L1.

However, although the majority of the teachers agreed that using L1 during an English class is helpful to a certain extent, they define some restrictions for using it, namely it hinders communication and makes the students depending on using it only and reluctant to use

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English, also it makes them fail to observe distinction between equivalence and fail to realize using English during instructional classroom activities.

Moreover, the results obtained from the audio-taped lesson showed that teachers use L1 much time with beginner pupils. This is related to the idea that using L1 serves pupils well, especially beginners. The findings are in line with those of Kim and Petraki (2009), who stated that the use of L1 turned the reading and writing tasks into manageable pieces of language works for students at beginner levels. Accordingly, most of the participants agreed that using L1 for the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing is indispensable. These results correspond with the findings of other studies, including Giannikas (2011), Gulzar (2010), and others, who found that a systematic employment of L1 in FL classes may overcome a great many problems from course content to affective dimension. Finally, the data obtained from this research about using L1 in FL classes are worth presenting in that they demonstrate a move from holding an English-only policy to an acceptable and non-random L1 use on an L1-FL use continuum.

CONCLUSION

The use of L1 in EFL classes has been a hot topic for discussion for many years, and it received a longstanding debate over whether it should be avoided or welcomed, to what extent its use facilitates EFL learning or poses a debilitating effect on learners. This contradiction has represented a perennial issue in EFL learning. Moreover, avoidance of L1 was associated with good teaching during the period of Direct and Audio-lingual methods. However, it has been shown recently by many scholars that a systematic and non-random employment of L1 into EFL instruction may open the door to an array of benefits including academic and affective domains.

Accordingly, the findings have demonstrated that teachers have positive pedagogical attitudes with regard to Algerian Arabic as the L1 in EFL classes. It also revealed that the use of L1 is for teaching some difficult topics in EFL such as grammar, comprehension of some abstract words, and in some cases, for classroom management. Also, there was an agreement among the

participants that, pedagogically speaking, it is ironic to teach EFL without reference to the learners' mother tongue and, therefore, their mother culture. And thus, using L1 when necessary may serve as a helping tool for both teachers and learners.

To conclude, it is high time that EFL teachers realize that they are not 'guilty' by using L1 in their classes because recent research and classroom reality are in favour of using L1 in English classes, since the former is considered as an important tool that facilitates EFL teaching. The present research supports the idea that a combination of the already existing EFL teachers' positive attitudes together with clear instructions by policy-makers will result a systematic 'front-door-use' rather than the previous 'back-door-use' of the L1 in EFL teaching.

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Appendices

Appendix (I)

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire is part of a research paper which aims at investigating the impact of the use of dialect in EFL teaching/learning. You are, therefore, kindly requested to answer the following questions by putting a tick (✓) in the appropriate box, or comment whenever necessary.

Gender:

Male ☐ Female ☐

Years of experience:

Levels of teaching:

- 1- Are you for or against using L1 during English classes?
For ☐ Against ☐
- 2- Do you use L1 during English classes ?
Yes ☐ No ☐
- 3- How often do you use L1 during EFL classes?
Always ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely ☐ never ☐
- 4- Do you think the use of L1 in the English classroom helps you teach this language?
No ☐ A little ☐ Fairly much ☐ A lot ☐
- 5- Do you think that using L1 in the classroom helps your learners to improve their level in English?
Yes ☐ No ☐
- 6- How often do you think L1 should be used in the English classroom?
Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Frequently ☐
- 7- When do you think it is necessary to use L1 in English classes?

	Reasons	yes	no
1	To help define some abstract words or new vocabulary		
2	To explain difficult concepts or ideas		
3	To organize tasks, questions and instructions		

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4	To explain grammar rules		
5	To give examples		
6	To compare L1 and L2 aspects of language		
7	To reinforce the bilingual competence		
8	To gain time and manage the class		
9	To draw students' attention and motivate them		
10	To overcome communicative difficulties in the classroom		
11	To facilitate teacher-student communication and relationships		
12	To reduce classroom anxiety		

Others, please specify

.....

8. According to you, what are the limitations of using Arabic in the classroom ?

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Thank you very much for your cooperation

Appendix (II)

Pupils' Questionnaire

Dear pupil,

This questionnaire is part of a research paper which aims at investigating the impact of the use of dialect in EFL teaching/learning. You are, therefore, kindly requested to answer the following questions by putting a cross (x) in the appropriate box, or comment, in any language, whenever necessary.

Gender:

Male ☐ Female ☐

Grade:

- 1- How can you describe your level in English ?
Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Average ☐ Weak ☐
- 2- Are you for or against using L1 during English classes ?
For ☐ Against ☐
- 3- Do you use L1 during English classes ?
Yes ☐ No ☐
- 4- How often do you use L1 during EFL classes ?
Always ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely ☐ never ☐
- 5- Do you think that using L1 in the classroom helps you to improve your level in English ?
Yes ☐ No ☐
- 6- Does your teacher use L1 during English classes ?
Always ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely ☐ never ☐
- 7- Does your teacher allow you to use L1 during English classes ?
Always ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely ☐ never ☐
- 8- Do you prefer your teacher to use L1 when:

	Reasons	yes	no
1	Explaining difficult vocabulary		
2	Explaining difficult grammar rules		
3	Giving instructions and managing the class		
4	Giving tasks and examples		

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5	Comparing L1 and L2 aspects of language		
6	Reinforcing the bilingual competence		
7	Correcting errors		
8	Drawing pupils' attention and motivating them		
9	Helping pupils individually		
1	Overcoming communicative difficulties in the classroom		
1	Facilitating teacher-pupil communication and relationships		
1	Reducing classroom anxiety		

9- Do you prefer your teacher to allow you to use L1 when you:

		Yes	No
0 1	Want to speak with your classmate		
0 2	Want to look something up (e.g. in a bilingual dictionary)		
0 3	Do not understand something		

Thank you very much for your cooperation

Appendix (III)

Audio-Taped Live Lesson

School Grades	Teacher's Time (Minutes)	Student's Time (Minutes)
1st Year		
2nd Year		
3rd Year		
4th Year		