

Primary school teachers' purposes and beliefs about the use of L1 in the EFL classroom

Propósitos e crenças dos professores da escola primária sobre o uso da L1 na sala de aula EFL

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ABSTRACT

This research study analyses the purposes of the use of Spanish as first language (L1) in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in a primary school in Cadiz (Andalusia), Spain. The work involves a descriptive mixed-methods, analysis in which data were collected, mainly, through systematic observation of EFL classes (N = 15) and teacher interviews (N = 2) during the academic year 2019-20. The results reveal (i) a high amount of L1 use by both teacher and learners; (ii) a remarkable number of interventions in L1; and (iii) an unmeaningful purpose of L1 use, among others. Final recommendations are provided on ways of using L1 in EFL teaching in primary education.

Keywords: Primary Education. Second language instruction. Teacher role.

RESUMO

Este estudo de pesquisa analisa os propósitos do uso do Espanhol como primeira língua (L1) na sala de aula de Inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) em uma escola primária em Cádiz (Andalusia), Espanha. O trabalho envolve uma análise descritiva de métodos mistos, na qual os dados foram coletados, principalmente, através da observação sistemática das aulas de EFL (N = 15) e entrevistas com professores (N = 2) durante o ano acadêmico de 2019-20. Os resultados revelam (i) um alto uso de L1 tanto pelo professor quanto pelos alunos; (ii) um número notável de intervenções em L1; e (iii) um baixo propósito de uso de L1, entre outros. As recomendações finais são apresentadas sobre as formas de utilização da L1 no ensino de línguas estrangeiras no ensino primário.

Palavras-chave: Educação primária. Ensino de segunda língua. Papel do professor.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of the mother tongue (L1) into foreign language (FL) teaching has been a controversial topic in educational settings (MACMILLAN; TURNBULL, 2009). Researchers have found that even in approaches in which the FL is used as the medium of instruction, judicious use of the L1 is manifest (MACARO; TIAN; CHU, 2018). Even if followers of exclusive FL use have rejected that the L1 can function as a pedagogical tool (KRASHEN; TERRELL, 1983; GENESE; 1994), others do consider its implementation (ATKINSON, 1987; HARBORD, 1992; COOK, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to ask ourselves whether or not the L1 should be used in FL teaching, and whether its use can boost or hamper learners' FL learning.

Learning a FL, different from the L1, has not always been considered as paramount as it is today. However, the positive impact that learning a new language can have on individuals' personal and academic lives has made researchers and educators be concerned about its development and the ways it can be improved (CABALLOS, 2006). Different approaches have been put into practice to adapt FL teaching to students' needs, so that the methodologies applied in an FL context can coherently be used to teach the target language in a purposeful way (ROMANOWSKI, 2019). On the one hand, the exclusion of the L1 in FL teaching was thought to be fundamental for learning the new language meaningfully, as there is little opportunity for being immersed in an FL context outside the classroom (MACMILLAN; TURNBULL, 2009). On the other hand, the application of L1 in FL teaching was also considered useful, as it seemed impossible for individuals not to use their L1 to master the target language (BUTZKAMM, 1998). Finally, as Rodríguez and Oxbrow (2008) point out, it could also be a potential tool used in the FL classroom for pedagogical purposes.

Therefore, the incorporation of approaches that sustain or ban the implementation of the L1 in FL teaching has been a controversial topic (MACMILLAN; TURNBULL, 2009). In fact, the use of the former sometimes depends on the teachers' belief systems (JIMOLA; OFODU, 2019) and their previous experiences on how the target language has been used not only as an individual resource, but also as a social phenomenon (ŽELJEŽIČ, 2017). However, although the L1 use has always been considered a "skeleton in the closet" because not many have deeply explored its role in the FL classroom (HE, 2012, p. 2), researchers are now examining its advantages and disadvantages in terms of FL teaching. Official authorities such as the United Kingdom National Curriculum Document, which stated that languages should be taught among the exclusive use of the FL, consider the appearance of a "gradual shift in policy to measure the inclusion of L1 in FL teaching"





(LITTLEWOOD; YU, 2011, p. 66). However, exclusive FL use approaches are still supported, as it provides a rich exposure to an FL environment (LITTLEWOOD; YU, 2011).

Taking this into account, the rationale of this research lies in whether the incorporation of the L1 can boost or hamper FL learning. To do so, this study will examine the amount of L1 used by one English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher of Primary Education in Cadiz, Andalusia (Spain). Moreover, the number of L1 interventions and the purposes of using the L1 are also main aspects analysed as part of a mixed-methods research, in which systematic classroom observation and teacher interviewing are considered. Through the interviews, the beliefs of the only two EFL teachers at the primary school regarding their intentions and thoughts on the use of L1 in the EFL classroom will be collected, i.e., their first-hand opinions based on their experience as FL learners, on the one hand, and, above all, as in-service teachers, on the other. Finally, some recommendations are presented to come up with an alternative that can improve the better teaching of the FL³.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Whether it is effective or useless to use the L1 in FL teaching, the ability to speak new languages has not always been considered a primary skill to develop in Andalusia, Spain (CABALLOS, 2006). It was not until the end of the 1990s that changes took place since the improvement of new professional opportunities was a real need (CABALLOS, 2006). Thus, teaching approaches that defended the exclusive FL use began to prevail over those that still opt for the use of L1 (COOK, 2001), the first one being considered as a support for acquiring the communicative language competence (SEŠEK, 2005) and the latter as a “source of embarrassment” (HE, 2012, p. 2). However, what the literature reveals does not always show the reality (HALL; COOK, 2014) and, although the exclusive use of the L1 is still mostly agreed (LITTLEWOOD; YU, 2011), researchers observed that the teachers’ “stated behaviors” were different from their “real behaviors” (COPLAND; NEOKLEOUS, 2011, p. 7). This context suggests three main areas of investigation: L1-FL contrast; purposes of L1 use in FL teaching; and the use of L1 to address cognitive and language problems.

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2.1 L1-FL contrast

The judicious use of L1 in FL teaching emerged as a controversial issue in educational contexts (MACMILLAN; TURNBULL, 2009). As a consequence, there are methods that defend the exclusive use of the target language, but also others that sustain the use of the L1 as a linguistic support in FL teaching (GAJŠT, 2017). In this respect, researchers began to analyse its implementation: Atkinson (1987) suggested a more valued view of the L1 use in FL teaching; Harbord (1992, p. 3) stated that the L1 use as a “constructive element” can be applied to FL learning; and Cook (2010) defended the potential of L1 use in the FL classroom. Extensive use of L1 and FL was also taking place in classroom settings (DUFF; POLIO, 1990). In contrast, current research reveals a decline in L1 use in university FL lessons (MACARO; TIAN; CHU, 2018), while that has not occurred yet in primary or secondary schools (YENICE, 2018). Then, it is established that nowadays teachers do not perceive FL as the only language of interaction (HALL; COOK, 2014; LASAGABASTER, 2013; WACH; MONROY, 2019). They believe that FL should be learned taking into consideration the presence of the students' L1 (COOK, 2001) since a new language would always face an existing L1 (BUTZKAMM, 2003). Thus, the monolingual approach advocated for years has begun to be questioned. A reconceptualization of FL teaching is considered fundamental since students need to accept their way of thinking, feeling, and living as regular people rooted in their L1 (PIASECKA, 1986). In turn, the implementation of an authentic bilingual environment is crucial for students to immerse themselves in today's multilingual society (MACMILLAN; TURNBULL, 2009).

2.2 Purposes of using the L1 in FL teaching

Researchers have found that L1 use in FL teaching is generally applied to social and pedagogical purposes (KIM; ELDER, 2005), which frequently leads them to give task instructions (HIGAREDA; LOPEZ; MUGFORD, 2009; LITTLEWOOD; YU, 2011; MORA *et al.*, 2011); to give explanations that can save the teachers' time to perform other tasks (HIGAREDA; LOPEZ; MUGFORD, 2009); to elicit students' responses in FL (VILLAMIL; GUERRERO, 1996); to encourage the implementation of social tasks as for the students (DE LA CAMPÁ; NASSAJI, 2009; HALL; COOK, 2014; YENICE, 2018); to address students' anxiety while using FL (HALL; COOK, 2014; MACARO, 2000; XHEMAILI, 2016; YOUNG, 1990); to assess or evaluate students' responses (DE LA CAMPÁ; NASSAJI, 2009); to translate words (ATKINSON; 1987; POLIO; DUFF, 1994; LIU, 2004; YENICE,





2018) to avoid misconceptions (BUTZKAMM, 2003); to check understanding (BROOKS-LEWIS, 2009; RODRÍGUEZ JUÁREZ; OXBROW, 2008); to contrast L1-FL structures (SCHWEERS, 1999; WACH; MONROY, 2019); etc.

2.3 L1 to address cognitive and language problems

Despite the social and pedagogical purposes of L1 use in FL teaching, it has also been considered that L1 use depends on the students' degree of FL proficiency and cognitive levels (CRAWFOR, 2004; YENICE, 2018). In this sense, Yenice's (2018) work established that teachers found it crucial to tailor FL instruction to each student. Thus, teachers tended to make greater use of the students' L1 with those with lower FL proficiency levels. Moreover, Crawford (2004) found that teachers use L1 more frequently with younger students than with older ones since the latter's FL proficiency levels are often considered higher. Also, Anton and DiCamilla (1998, p. 1) found that the L1 use in FL teaching in terms of cognitive levels of progression is useful in providing scaffolding for students when they solve a task since "the L1 becomes here the voice of the expert." Finally, Blyth (1995, p. 103) expressed that L1 will always emerge from people's minds as a "private inner speech."

3 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The general aim of this study is to explore the ways how the use of the L1 (Spanish) boosts or hampers EFL learning in the context of analysis, that is, a primary school in Cadiz, Andalusia (Spain). Moreover, the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To measure the amount of EFL and L1 produced by both teacher and learners.
2. To specify the number of teacher's L1 interventions.
3. To identify the purposes of L1 use as a pedagogical tool.

Taking into account these objectives, three research hypotheses are posed:

1. The use of L1 in the ELF classroom by both teacher and learners is high.
2. The number of L1 interventions by both teacher and learners is noteworthy.
3. The use of L1 has no pedagogical implications for EFL teaching.





4 METHOD

This study involves a descriptive mixed-methods data analysis developed by systematic classroom observation and teachers' interviews. Paramount aspects related to the context and the participants, the tools used for collecting the data, and the limitations experienced are included in this section.

4.1 Context and participants

This investigation took place in a public non-bilingual primary school located in Cadiz, Andalusia (Spain)⁴. At the beginning of this investigation, there was a total of 30 EFL classes, four teachers and 230 students to be analysed. However, due to the limitations experienced during the COVID-19 virus pandemic, a previous investigation carried out in this same school was needed to proceed with the research. Consequently, the sample was reduced to 15 EFL classes, one teacher, and 85 students. The teacher analysed was a Spanish woman specialised in EFL teaching for primary school students. Meanwhile, the sample of students belonged to four different groups: three classes of Year 1 (6-7 years old), who had three sessions of one hour each per week; and one class of Year 5 (10-11 years old), who had two sessions of one hour and a half each per week⁵.

Initially, the goal of this research was to measure the amount of L1 (Spanish) produced in the EFL classroom by both teacher and learners, as well as to determine the different purposes in which the L1 was used by the teacher when teaching EFL. Both the amount of L1 use and the number of L1 interventions were firstly considered to be excessively high, which consequently led to believe that the way in which the L1 was usually used by the teacher was unmeaningful. However, as it has already been said, a previous investigation with a similar topic was used to continue with the current research, whose goal was more focused on the analysis of the FL use, rather than on the L1 use.

⁴ The overall research plan was approved by both the school's leadership team, including the parents of all children involved, and the teacher who participated in the classroom observation.

⁵ A confidentiality agreement was signed to ensure that the participation of the different figures (school, teachers, and students) was kept anonymous.





4.2 Tools for data collection

Due to the difficulties experienced during the quarantine period, many procedures and tools were considered to accomplish the collection of the study's data. In this sense, a previous investigation already completed during a university internship was the main instrument to develop the current analysis, as it was the only suitable alternative to continue with the research. The goal of this study was more focused on the analysis of the FL use, rather than on the L1 use. However, the results obtained were easily adapted to the current research. At first, the FL interventions were measured on time. They were gathered every ten minutes for each hour (Year 1) or hour and a half (Year 5) the sessions lasted. However, once the results were finally calculated, they were found to be slightly inexact. Therefore, to improve their reliability, L1 interventions were decided to be counted during each of the activities done per session attended.

Thus, an MS Excel template was designed to facilitate the collection of these L1 interventions. So, six research elements were included in the gathering process: time per session attended; group of students; number of activities; number of L1 interventions done per activity; L1 functions; and examples that could clarify the use of L1. Nonetheless, before applying the previous template to the context of analysis, De la Campa and Nassaji's (2009) research was employed for determining the purposes in which the teacher used Spanish in her EFL lessons. Thus, seven of the fourteen L1 utterances gathered in this research article were identified to be the L1 functions most employed: activity objective; translation; evaluation; elicitation of students' contribution; comprehension check; L1-FL contrast; and classroom equipment.

Finally, two interviews were arranged along with the teacher analysed and the second EFL teacher working at the same school. These interviews needed to be developed online, so WhatsApp was chosen by the teachers as the most practical resource to arrange the videoconferences. In this way, six questions were asked in Spanish after the data obtained from classroom observation were collected and analysed. The questions were designed, validated by one expert in didactics of EFL teaching, and divided into two groups (see Table 1): three general questions based on the L1 use in EFL classes and three specific questions that varied depending on the answers obtained:





Table 1: Teacher interview

General questions	Specific questions
To what extent is it necessary to use Spanish in the EFL classroom?	Why is Spanish so much present in EFL teaching?
How should L1 be treated in lower and upper grades?	Why is it observed that Spanish is used more in upper than lower grades?
For what purpose do you usually use Spanish in EFL teaching?	Spanish has been used for purposes like evaluation. Have you been aware of this or other uses of Spanish?

Source: own elaboration

4.3 Limitations

Many limitations were faced during the development of this research. The first one was the impossibility of continuing with the investigation because of the Covid-19 lockdown. However, former research based on a similar topic was used as an alternative to proceeding with it. Nonetheless, since the former study was arranged during a university internship, there was a lower number of participants and it was difficult to observe an equal number of different students' groups. Furthermore, as pointed out, measuring the amount of time in which the L1 was used by the teacher made the results very inexact. However, it was decided that the L1 use should be gathered by counting the interventions done per activity accomplished in class. Moreover, it was also needed to determine the functions in which the L1 was frequently used according to De la Campa and Nassaji's (2009) categorization. Finally, the arrangement of the two different interviews could not be developed at first. Nevertheless, thanks to technological resources, teachers could be interviewed through videoconference.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall, it has been observed that the L1 takes a significant part of the FL teaching analysed in this investigation. The results and, consequently, their interpretations will be displayed into three different sections that will explain different aspects of the L1 use. These sections are referred to as the excessive use of the L1; the remarkable number of L1 interventions; and the unmeaningful purpose of using the L1.

5.1 High amount of L1 use





It was detected that the amount of L1 use is considerably high as compared to the FL use. The average amount of L1 produced by the teacher during the 15 classes is 85.4%, which leads to only 14.6% of FL use. Consequently, students were encouraged to produce a low amount of FL: 13.4%, while 86.6% aimed at L1 use. This amount of L1 (85.4%) seems to be in line with current research that shows how EFL teachers in Primary schools still make great use of the students' L1 (YENICE, 2018). In fact, since the amount of L1 was measured as very high, it is considered that the results obtained are more closely related to previous research in which the L1 was still overused without any pedagogical objective (DUFF; POLIO, 1990; KANEKO, 1992).

Despite this, and although Teacher 1 considers that L1 use is a very significant pedagogical tool for EFL teachers, she was aware that she had to use FL more frequently so that students could be more immersed in the FL context: "Spanish is a very necessary tool in EFL lessons [...] but I would like to use the FL more often since it is the main vehicle of communication" (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Therefore, confirming the thoughts of Prodomou (2002), one perceives a feeling of guilt that arises from the teacher herself since she seems to be aware that (an excessive) L1 use is a "source of embarrassment." She tried to justify the L1 use by pointing out how limited the work of EFL teachers is sometimes: "EFL teachers have very limited time and we are usually in a hurry to finish everything we have to teach" (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 5, 2020). In this case, although several studies have shown that the L1 is often used as a way to save time (HIGAREDA, 2009; LITTLEWOOD; YU, 2011), it can be observed that the teacher subconsciously abandoned the FL to stick to a seemingly unchangeable content planning.

She also pointed out the lack of control that FL teachers have over students when they want to organise more speaking activities where the FL is expected to be used more often: "You can't always practise speaking activities using the FL because students get out of control" (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 5, 2020). This statement seems to be closely related to some kind of framework goal as exposed by Kim and Elder (2005): They mention that the L1 is often used for social purposes like student control and discipline (HALL; COOK, 2014; YENICE, 2018). Also, she noted that L1 use often helps her become less exhausted and students less frustrated: "There are students who become unmotivated when teachers use the FL all the time [...]. Sometimes even teachers are tired of using the FL for a long time" (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 5, 2020). This belief is consistent with the idea that the L1 is often used as a way to set intra-classroom social tasks (HALL; COOK, 2014), especially if students are in a frustrating situation where they cannot understand anything that is being said (YOUNG, 1990; MACARO, 2000). However, using the L1 continually only





leads to situations where students feel comfortable when the L1 is actively involved in the sessions. In contrast, the FL can only be acquired when students are exposed to comprehensible input in contexts where they can feel comfortable enough to use the FL (KRASHEN, 1982).

Although Teacher 2 also agreed with the fact that the L1 is an important pedagogical tool, she made it clear that it is not a resource to overuse, which corresponds entirely to the idea that the L1 is considered efficient only when it is used judiciously (ATKINSON, 1987; HARBORD, 1992; MACARO; TIAN; CHU, 2018): “I believe that it is a valid resource to be used in its proper measure without overusing it” (Teacher 2, personal communication, May 12, 2020). Furthermore, she added that, as an FL student herself, she understands the L1 as a useful tool for learning FL, which confirms the fact that the L1 use in the (E)FL classroom will sometimes depend on the teachers' previous experiences as FL learners (DUFF; POLIO, 1990; KANEKO, 1992): “As far as my experience as an EFL student is concerned, having the L1 as a learning reference is very useful” (Teacher 2, personal communication, May 12, 2020). Furthermore, she thinks that FL teachers do not often feel comfortable saying they use the L1 in FL teaching because of (new) methodological approaches that advocate the exclusive use of FL in Spain: “I think that the emergence of different approaches that support the exclusive use of the FL in Spain has made teachers feel guilty about using the L1 in EFL classes. That is why some teachers defend the exclusive use of the FL but continue to use the L1 for specific purposes” (Teacher 2, personal communication, May 12, 2020). In this sense, Prodomou's (2002) observation that teachers feel uncomfortable when using the students' L1 also reveals that teachers often feel guilty when they choose the L1 as the easiest way to face students' language challenges, instead of constantly adapting FL teaching to their needs.

Moreover, the amount of L1 produced by the teacher was higher when she focused on the Year 1. However, although two different groups of students were investigated and therefore different levels of FL competence were observed, the variance between the amount of L1 produced by the teacher in Years 1 and 5 was not noteworthy (87.5% and 79.1%, respectively). Thus, younger students used more Spanish (L1) than the advanced ones (90.3% and 76.0%, respectively). However, the difference between the amount of L1 produced by the teacher and the students was surprising, since advanced students used it less than the teacher herself (76.0% and 79.1%, respectively). Surprisingly, several studies have revealed total opposite situations about the amount of L1 produced by teachers and students, meaning that the L1 has frequently been more used by the learners than by the teachers themselves (LEVINE, 2003). However, the reason was thought to be the lack of interaction between the teacher and the advanced learners, as the teaching process implemented with advanced students





was based on doing writing exercises. Therefore, the FL was used by the learners only if the writing exercises needed to be corrected.

To sum up, it is noticed that the L1 prevails over the FL after observing and analyzing the teacher's performance in the EFL classroom. Consequently, students are not exposed to FL input and therefore a lower amount of FL is produced by them, which results in learners being immersed in a very decontextualized FL context that disturbs language acquisition. In fact, the context of analysis avoids what Larsen-Freeman (2011, p. 54) asserts in terms of FL acquisition: "from repeated soft-assemblies in co-adapted interactions, stable language-using patterns emerge", focusing instead on learners' L1 use so that they recognise these language-using patterns.

5.2 Remarkable number of L1 interventions

The number of L1 interventions done by the teacher analysed through classroom observation was also an aspect to be studied. Therefore, 82 L1 interventions were collected during the analysis of the FL teaching. The average number of L1 interventions observed in all classes attended was about six interventions per class, being the lowest number two and the highest nine. In comparison to De la Campa and Nassaji's (2009) research, in which 526 L1 interventions were collected during 60 lessons, the 82 L1 interventions, gathered in the 15 classes analysed in the current research, seem to be a significant number. Teacher 1 justified this excessive amount of L1 interventions by emphasising the lack of time FL teachers usually experience during the lessons: "Due to the great number of students, lack of time, class diversity, specific contents... Foreign language teachers feel to be always in a rush". (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 5, 2020). Nonetheless, the fact that FL teachers use the L1 as a way of saving time is not an excuse for avoiding communicating through the target language. Therefore, the L1 was not used as a pedagogical tool, which does not coincide with other researchers' results (ATKINSON, 1987; HARBORD, 1992; COOK, 2010). On the contrary, the L1 was used as the medium of instruction, as it appeared to have more weight than the FL itself.

Additionally, although there is a higher number of classes observed in the Year 1 (N = 10) than in the Year 5 (N = 5), a bigger amount of L1 interventions was happening in the early group (N = 63) than in the advanced one (N = 19). Moreover, the number of L1 interventions collected from Year 1 usually overtook six interventions per class, whereas, in Year 5 it did not often exceed that many (n = 4). In this way, Teacher 1 believes that, depending on the students' proficiency levels, the use of the L1 would be higher or lower. Therefore, that could be the reason why Teacher 1 did a greater number





of L1 interventions in Year 1 than in Year 5: “I think I use the L1 with younger students more frequently because this is new for them. In advanced years, students understand the FL better, so I do not need to use the L1 a lot,” (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 5, 2020). This coincides with many investigations where the L1 is found to be more used with younger students (CRAWFORD, 2004; MACMILLAN; TURNBULL, 2009; YENICE, 2018). However, even though Teacher 1 agrees with this fact, when she was asked about why there was not a huge difference between the amount of L1 used in Years 1 and 5, and she said that the use of the L1 comes naturally to her. Therefore, rather than using the L1 for adapting the FL teaching to the students' proficiency levels, she was making things easier for herself by using the L1 when the input was not comprehensible.

Teacher 2 also thinks that the L1 use is highly conditioned. She mentioned that it all depends on the methodology you use: “As students improve their FL, you can leave the L1 aside. However, as we tend to use a more ludic teaching method with younger learners, the amount of L1 use is less” (Teacher 2, personal communication, May 12, 2020). This confirms that teaching the FL by putting in practice approaches that only consider the exclusive use of the target language just depends on whether FL teachers are well-prepared for implementing these types of ‘new’ methodologies.

Overall, the L1 is seen as a tool for helping teachers getting things done quicker and easier, rather than as a potential resource for helping students acquire the FL better. Therefore, teachers do not respect the “natural order” (KRASHEN, 1982, p. 7) in which the FL is acquired; i.e., the language grammar structures are acquired in a pre-determined order.

5.3 Unmeaningful purpose of using the L1

To analyse in which way the L1 was used in these FL lessons as if the teacher was using it as a pedagogical tool, a variety of purposes, that could describe the different functions in which the L1 was employed was also studied. Activity objective was the L1 function most used by the teacher (35.3%), which coincides with other investigations' results (LITTLEWOOD; YU, 2011). In addition, this function was more repeated in Year 1 than in Year 5 (44.4% and 26.3%, respectively). Moreover, activity objective was used as a way of saving time by giving the activities' instructions using the L1. However, the teachers' purpose was to use this function as a way of continuing to complete the coursebook's activities, rather than focusing on other tasks. As a result, students were more focused on “learning the language itself”, rather than “learning to communicate in the foreign language” (MORA *et al.*, 2011).





The second L1 function most repeated in these FL lessons was translation (19.2%), which does not coincide with other investigations' gatherings (DE LA CAMPA; NASSAJI, 2009). In addition, translation was more commonly used with older students than with younger ones (17.5% and 21.0%, respectively) because the teacher had enough material to avoid translation in Year 1. Therefore, this confirms that the FL can easily be taught through the exclusive use of the FL if strategies such as actions, mime, or gestures are implemented in the teaching process (LASAGABAESTER, 2013). Evaluation was the third L1 function most used by the teacher in FL teaching (16.8%). Nonetheless, this L1 function was more frequently used with advanced students (21,0%) than with younger learners (12.7%). The reason that could explain this situation could be the fact that little FL interaction was shared between the teacher and the advanced students. Therefore, the L1 use was pointless and it was only 'useful' when the teacher tried to correct students' errors quickly.

Elicitation of student contribution was the following L1 function most used by the teacher in EFL lessons (13.6%), which coincides with some investigations covered in this study (VILLAMIL; GUERRERO, 1996). However, this was again more repeated in the advanced group (21.0%) than in the early one (6.3%). The reason for this was related to how frustrated (KRASHEN, 1982) it was for the learners to make use of the FL in the classroom. So, it seemed that how the FL was taught to these students in previous years led to the appearance of negative attitudes towards its learning. Therefore, students perceived the learning of a new language as a subject they were obliged to pass through. The next most repeated L1 function was comprehension check (9.0%). However, this L1 function is more used among FL teachers as compared to this analysis (RODRÍGUEZ JUÁREZ; OXBROW, 2008). Besides, this function was more used in Year 1 than in Year 5 (12.7% and 5.3%, respectively), as the teacher usually made use of it when younger students needed to understand specific concepts. However, using the L1 as a way of checking the students' comprehension usually led to students forgetting about the explanations given, as learners were obliged to memorise what the teacher said.

Finally, the L1 functions less employed by the teacher in FL teaching were L1-FL contrast (2.6%) and classroom equipment (1.6%). On the one hand, L1-FL contrast was only used with advanced students (5.3%) as this L1 function was more used to explain grammar differences and similarities. However, in comparison to other researches, this was very uncommon to see, as this L1 function is frequently used in FL teaching (WACH; MONROY, 2019). This was thought to be because of the teacher's necessity to make students 'understand' quicker the grammar structures. Therefore, the language is being sacrificed and students cannot see the real aim of learning a new language. On the other hand, classroom equipment was also used once with younger learners (1.6%) as a way of





informing them about a specific equipment problem. Perhaps, the reason of this was because the teacher did not consider that using the FL for giving such types of explanations would have been useful for boosting the FL acquisition.

When Teacher 1 was asked about the objectives in which she frequently made use of the L1 in FL teaching, she mentioned that she mostly uses the L1 for grammar and vocabulary explanations, which contradicts the statement that teaching a foreign language should be focused on learning the language to communicate through it, respecting the natural order in which it should be acquired (KRASHEN, 1982). However, when some of the seven L1 functions she made use were mentioned to her in the interview, she realised that, even though she was aware of some of these uses, she was not conscious about the use of the L1 for evaluating the students, for instance, which confirms the lack of consciousness teachers often have when using the L1 in an unmeaningful way, instead of as a pedagogical tool (WACH; MONROY, 2019): “I am aware that I use Spanish in my lessons. However, I sometimes do not realise I use the L1 for evaluating my students, for example. Usually, it comes natural to me because it is my mother tongue” (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 5, 2020).

When Teacher 2 was asked about the purposes in which she uses the L1 in FL teaching, she said that she tended to use it to facilitate comprehension among her students: “It is important that students have a previous referent for understanding concepts of the FL. When learners do not understand anything that it is being said they get frustrated. Therefore, this helps me to adapt the lesson to everybody” (Teacher 2, personal communication, May 12, 2020). In this case, more than using the L1 as a way of providing scaffolding, it seemed that the teacher only wanted to confront these cognitively or language issues quicker. Moreover, when she was asked if she had ever been unaware about the use of some of the seven L1 functions collected in the study, she also confirmed that she was and that she usually felt guilty when that happened. However, she added that it comes natural to her to use the L1 instead of the FL because it is her mother tongue. Again, the fact that teachers and students are always going to be rooted to their L1 is used as an excuse to justify the high amount of L1 used in FL teaching (PIASECKA, 1986), where the FL stops being the principal vehicle of communication.

To sum up, thoughts such as Cook's (2001), which concerns that the FL is always confronted to an L1, has led to situations like these, where the teacher thinks that the FL acquisition cannot be achieved without the constant presence of the L1. However, we should consider that our mother tongue was never acquired through the presence and use of another language, so trying to interrupt





the FL teaching by making constant interventions using the L1, as if we were using it as a pedagogical tool, might hamper the acquisition of the new language.

6 CONCLUSION

In terms of the general objective of this research (see Table 2), the regular ways in which the L1 was used in the EFL teaching settings observed was not useful for boosting FL. Concerning specific objectives 1 and 2, the amount of L1 use and the number of L1 interventions done in the EFL classrooms were exceedingly high, even making a more extensive use of the FL in Year 5 than in Year 1. As a consequence, students also made use of a very high amount of L1, although there were situations where students used EFL even more than the teacher herself. Regarding specific objective 3, the L1 was used as the medium of instruction in EFL teaching principally for activity objective and translation, making the teaching-learning process so traditional: Approaching the FL was completely based on memorizing concepts and completing exercises from the coursebook. It implies that EFL was not considered as a valuable tool for communicating with other individuals:

Table 2: Identification of the objectives and confirmation of the research hypotheses

General objective. The excessive use of Spanish (L1) by the teacher affects the development of EFL classes. The L1 is used regularly in Years 1 and 5. This context leads to the misunderstanding of English (FL) as a communication tool by students, limiting its use to grammar exercises.	
Specific objective 1. The amount of L1 used by the teacher is surprisingly high, bearing in mind the EFL context. It is noteworthy that the teacher uses the L1 more often in Year 1 than in Year 5. It is not only due to the subject itself but also to the teacher's personal beliefs about L1 use in FL teaching.	Research hypothesis 1. This is confirmed since the use of L1 is really high, as established by the percentages achieved: The average amount of L1 produced by the teacher is 85.4%, which also has a direct impact on the significant use of L1 by the students (86.6%).
Specific objective 2. The number of L1 interventions by the teacher is quite significant. These are more common in Year 1 than in Year 5. Teachers justify this again by remarking the characteristics of the EFL subject itself.	Research hypothesis 2. This is confirmed since the average number of L1 interventions is noteworthy. Thus, six L1 interventions per session were recorded in upper and lower courses (Years 1 and 5).
Specific objective 3. The purposes of L1 use are activity objective, translation and evaluation, while the least used are L1-FL contrast and classroom equipment.	Research hypothesis 3. This is confirmed since the purposes of L1 use are mainly functional for the resolution of formal issues different to pedagogical.

Source: own elaboration

Finally, the high use of L1 might produce detrimental effects on how EFL is learnt by the students. Then, it is suggested to seek a balance between both languages that can be made in order to prevail the use of the FL over the L1. Nonetheless, although a moderate L1 use in order not to hamper





the FL learning is recommended (ATKINSON; 1987; HARBORD; 1992; COOK; 2010), the FL classroom is the only opportunity where students can really get exposed to the target language (LITTLEWOOD; YU, 2011). Then, the aim is to ensure the use of the FL with communicative purposes, without impeding learning by the constant interference of the L1. It is paramount that teachers consider schools as globalizing contexts where communication becomes effective: these are one of the few institutions that can facilitate students' multilingual and multicultural immersion, at least in the context of analysis (CABALLOS, 2006). Even though the L1 was used for specific purposes, these L1 functions were not aimed at social or pedagogical goals. On the contrary, the teacher analysed through classroom observation made use of the L1 functions as a way of benefiting herself. It was a way of getting things done easier and confronting cognitive challenges resulting from language learning quicker, but not meaningfully. As a result, a revision of how to incorporate L1 into FL teaching should be done since the EFL lessons analysed in this investigation were mostly taught in the students' L1 (Spanish), keeping the FL use aside.

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