



The Iranian EFL Students' and Teachers' Perception of Using Persian in General English Classes

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Abstract

This paper examined the perception of Iranian EFL learners and teachers towards employing Persian in EFL classes. The present study was a case study which investigated teachers' and students' perception toward effective use of L1 and L2 in General English classes at university level. The participants were 345 students and 25 teachers at the University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. Two research tools were used for gathering data: questionnaires and interviews. Analysis of the qualitative study and comparing the mean scores of two groups via Mann-whitney revealed that the perceptions of the teachers and the students differ from each other. Iranian EFL learners were willing to use their mother tongue. While, Iranian EFL teachers had a positive tendency to use more English than Persian in the General English classes. Teachers have to consider that the major medium of instruction must be English. They should use L1 judiciously in FL classrooms whenever possible and beneficial to relieve anxious, nervous, frightened, and reluctant students as well as learners with low self-esteem.

Keywords: Perception, L1 (Persian), L2 (English), EFL, use of L1, Translation

1. Introduction

By looking at the theoretical background of using L1 in L2 classroom, periodic and regular changes could be observed in views toward L1 and L2 (Auerbach, 1993). Several hundred years ago, it was a norm to use learners' mother tongue in studying L2 by translation technique; however, at that time, bilingual learning and teaching was universal and almost accepted, because written word was emphasized over the spoken word at that era. Meanwhile, in the 19th century, by emphasis on the spoken rather the written word, a new trend (monolingual approach) began to spread its domination on language teaching. Furthermore, the influence of vast migration and colonialism in the 20th century further increased the Monolingual Approach (Miles, 2004).

Phillipson (1992) believes that the monolingual tenet was evolved by the teachers who went abroad during the colonial teaching period. Like the British colonies where English became the predominant culture, even those who were not part of it, were forced to emulate it in order to have a better life or to be a part of this ruling elite (Hawks, 2001). At the same time, those who migrated to the United States, hoping to make a life in the new country, were also compelled to assimilate. As a result, this led them to perceive English as the superior language above all other languages and as a language that should only be spoken and used in English-language classrooms. This rapid and widespread dominance of English at home and overseas has been called Linguistic Imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Together, these pieces of evidence suggest that some practical and political reasons in the history of ELT caused different trends toward using L1 and L2 effectively in English-language classrooms.

1.1 Statement of the problem

A student's perception toward a language is one of the leading predictors of success in learning that language. As a result, teachers and educators should take perception and attitude factors into consideration when designing English language training and instruction. Perception is accepted as an important concept to understand human behavior and it is defined as a mental state that includes beliefs and feelings. However, negative perception can impede learning a language (Ellis, 1984). But a student's negative attitudes and perception can be changed and turned into positive ones and facilitate getting a positive result.

As Ellis (1984) points out, "language learners are not only communicators and problem-solvers, but whole persons with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities" (p.39). Therefore, it highlights perception as a crucial factor that all researchers and language teachers should take into account. Reviewing the literature shows that

complete deletion of L1 in L2 situations is not appropriate (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002). Some scholars have investigated the classroom practice by searching the amount and the reasons of using L1 in L2 classes (Horst, white, and Bell, 2010; Macaro, 2001; Nation, 2003; Tang, 2002). Other researchers have also looked at teacher and learners' perceptions toward using L1 and L2 (Dash, 2002; Nazary, 2008; Prodromou, 2002; Schweers, 1999) in which various results have been concluded.

Similarly, when it comes to the context of Iran, the use of L1 and FL among Iranian EFL students is subject to controversy. For example, Siah-Chashm (1995) concludes that failure of the learners in learning the target language is due to the use of mother tongue, while Moradabadi (2003) recommends the use of L1(Persian) and translation as a technique in EFL classes. It seems that both teachers and students in Iran are completely confused about the use of their mother tongue, Persian, in English classes. As a result, this study is going to probe on this problem.

Jahangard (2007) argues that students' aural and oral skills are not emphasized in Iranian prescribed EFL textbooks. Teachers do not emphasize on oral drills, pronunciation, listening and speaking abilities. On the other hand, much emphasis is placed on reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. The main aim of the textbooks and teachers is to prepare students to pass the tests and exams. Productive abilities of students are not measured, that is why most teachers avoid the oral drills in the prescribed books. As Rahimi (1996) stated, grammar translation method was used all over the country in 1950s and audiolingual method was implemented in English language classes in 1960s. But as he argued ALM was not successful in Iranian English contexts because there was a shortage of qualified teachers, teaching aids and time. Due to these facts, the medium of instruction at high schools is Persian, while at the private language institutions it is mostly English and when it comes to the university for General English (a course which is so widely spread for all sorts of universities and educational majors in Iran) they actually do not know what to do with Persian and English in EFL classes.

Some students believe that when they are not allowed to express their opinions in Persian, they might experience fear, insecurity, and low self-esteem. As a result, these students may not be able to participate well in the learning process. Yet, there are students who complain about L1 use in FL classrooms, arguing that L1 use limits their opportunities to practice the FL and reduces their FL exposure (Rahimi, 1996).

Due to these confusions, the present researcher was prompted to embark on a study on Iranian university students' and teachers' perceptions to see if using L1 would be facilitative or debilitating in L2 classes.

1.2 Significance and purpose of the study

According to the literature, very few studies have been carried out so far, dealing with L1 use, especially at the university level in Iran. Moreover, some researches in the realm of the learners' perceptions resulted in contradictory conclusions and very few of them have been run for both teachers' and learners' perceptions in the university context, e.g. General English classes. Thus, this research can be beneficial a lot. Furthermore, coordination and congruence between teachers' and their students' perception in effective use of L1 and L2 is the issue which has not been dealt in previous researches but this research looked at it closely.

From the foregoing discussion, it is expected that the findings of this investigation will be helpful firstly for the language teachers, becoming aware of the effect and role that mother tongue has on the learning and teaching of the target language (Bateman, 2008). Secondly, for teacher educators at the teacher training and development centers, being assisted to review foreign language teaching. Thirdly, for the syllabus designers and material writers, especially, at the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, to reexamine their view toward learners' mother tongue while designing the syllabus and teaching materials. And finally, for the language teaching Methodology researchers, to carry further investigation in the area, opening new gate to the improvement of ELT method and techniques by incorporating L1 use in L2 classroom. More generally, the findings could be crucial in noticing the point the teachers and students are recently at the use of the mother tongue (Persian) in General English classes at the university level, especially in Iranian context.

1.3 The review of literature

In the following sections the role of L1 in L2 teaching and learning, use of L1 in L2 classes, L1 use and L2 Teaching Methods would be discussed. Moreover, some research on the teachers and students' perception toward use of L1 in L2 classrooms would be reviewed.

1.3.1 The role of L1 (mother tongue) in L2 (second/ Foreign Language) Teaching and Learning

Researches show that a person who acquires his/her first language in childhood differs from an adult who learns a second/foreign language (Cook, 1992; Krashen, 1982) because in the former case, usually young children pick up their language naturally and normally in a cultural and linguistic environment, while they learn the second language later than the first language after the critical period, usually in separation from the appropriate and proper linguistic and cultural environment.

Language learners construct language knowledge based on prior conceptual information and improve it in predictable stages. As a result, L2 learners are more powerful linguistically and cognitively, because their prior knowledge enables them to make use of their analytical mind in learning a new language (Al-Harbi, 2010). Gass and Selinker (1983, p.7) reported: "There is overwhelming evidence that language transfer is indeed a real and central phenomenon that must be considered in any full account of the second language acquisition process" (Cited in Al-Harbi, 2010, p.2). Moreover, research evidence shows that learners with strong mother tongue would be more successful in learning and functioning

in another language (Krashen, 1982; Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Further, it was also proved by these researchers that skills such as: speaking, listening, reading and writing acquired in the first language are transferable to the target language.

On the other hand, Lightbown and Spada (1999) argued that the patterns transferred from the first language are undoubtedly the crucial sources of errors in the target language learning. Krashen (1982) claims that interference is a kind of habitual and automatic transfer of the surface structure of the first language to the surface of the target language. Ellis (2008) believes that learners tend to build their interim rules by using their L1 knowledge in the process of target language learning. Nevertheless, in the process of target language learning, L1 knowledge would be composed with the L2 knowledge; as a result; they will fuse into a mutual set of knowledge (Beebe, 1988; cited in Al-Harbi, 2010). According to Cook (1992), all target language learners generally access their L1, while processing the L2. He further argues that L1 would not be switched off in the process of learning L2; rather, it is constantly available. Indeed, Cook (1992) emphasizes that teachers should not ignore and isolate the learners' L1 in L2 teaching because it is permanently present in the L2 learners' minds, whether the instructor wants it to be or not.

It could be concluded that learning a new language without making some or at least minimal use of one's own L1 is impossible. Furthermore, it could be explained why in situations where L1 was prohibited, students usually seem unable to think properly and appear to be completely confused, insecure and alienated, particularly at lower levels (Boukella, 2011).

1.3.2 Arguments for and against the use of L1 in L2 classrooms (the Monolingual and Bilingual Approach)

To Macaro (2005), there is a sort of continuum of views on target language and first language use. The exclusive use of the target language or 'virtual position', as Macaro said, is one of these extreme poles of views. Those who are the proponents of the virtual position consider no pedagogical or communicative value in using L1 in L2 learning. To Cook (2001), who is not the proponent of monolingual approach, there are three principles for those who are the advocates of the monolingual approach (cited in Miles, 2004):

1. The learning of a second/foreign language should model the learning of the first language by maximum exposure to the L2.
2. Separation and distinction of L1 and L2 would lead to successful learning.
3. The importance of L2 has to be made clear for the learners by its continuous use.

On the other extreme of the debates, there is the 'Maximal position', proponents of which agree that target language can sometimes be helped and processed by the use of the mother tongue in due time, but this fact has to be taken into account that the overuse of the first language will reduce the learners' exposure to the target language input (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). By considering the pedagogical value of using L1, Prodromou (2001) in the case of using mother tongue, uses the term 'reservoir' where L1 creates a crutch for students.

Considering the psychological role of L1 in L2 classes, Auerbach (1993) contends that using L1 would help L2 learners to take risks and experiment English; she also concludes that a sense of security will be aroused in learners in which their lived experiences would be validated; thus, they could be able to express themselves, because in such a way the psychological barriers have been removed and learners are allowed to have a more rapid progress.

In designing the activity in L2 classroom, Choffey (2001) believes that L1 culture and physical environment are very helpful for three main reasons:

1. To relate the learning activities to the students' experiences, accumulated during L1 acquisition.
2. In the case of specific lexical items between the mother tongue and target language culture, learners will learn how to deal with.
3. To establish a kind of strong relationship between L1 and L2.

1.3.3 L1 use and L2 Teaching Methods

The extensive use of L1 to explain the new items and compare L1 and L2 was permitted in Grammar Translation Method (Stern, 1983; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). To Cook (2001), translation between L1 and L2 is a common procedure and L2 structure will be best learnt if contrasted and compared with the L1 structure in GTM. This method has been widely used in English classes, especially in Iranian EFL context, although it has been criticized and disfavored in language teaching. The Community Language Learning (CLL) tries to deal with fears and negative feelings of students by making the teacher as a language counselor. Students' security is initially enhanced by using their native language and translation is normally used. Native language equivalents of words and also directions in mother tongue are given to students in the classroom (Richards & Rogers, 2001). The purpose of L1 is to provide a bridge from the familiar to unfamiliar. Hence, sessions during which students express their feelings toward L2 learning and situations, are conducted in their L1 (Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

On the other hand some language teaching methods ignore or minimize the use of mother tongue. For example, Direct Method (DM), appeared in late 19th century as a reaction to the GTM and laid a great stress on the use of the target language from the outset since GTM could not lead learners to a good communicative ability in L2 (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

When the DM fell out of favor, the Audio-lingual Method (ALM) was developed in the United States during the World War II (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Larsen-Freeman (1986) reports that the habits of the students' native language were thought to interfere with the students' attempts to master the target language; therefore, by emphasizing the spoken language skills over the written skills, the target language was used in the classroom, not the students' mother tongue. The Natural Approach (NA), developed by Krashen and Terrel (1983) accentuates the significance of meaning in language learning and was based on the tenets of the comprehensible input hypothesis and lots of exposure to the target language. The NA argues that except the restricted use of the L1 for responding to the comprehension activities at the initial stages of L2 learning, the target language should always be used in the classroom without any translation and use of L1 (Howatt, 1982). In Silent Way (SW) as an innovative approach, it was believed that a natural approach based on the principles of first language learning is not suitable for adults (Chastain, 1988). The native language is used during the feedback sessions but translation is avoided; however, the students' native language could be used for giving instructions and to help improve their pronunciation. In Suggestopedia, native language translation is used to make the meaning of dialogue clear (Chastain, 1988). The teacher also uses the native language in class when necessary but he/she uses it less and less as the course proceeds (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In Total Physical Response, language is presented by orders, commands and instructions while requiring a physical response from the learner (Richards, et al., 1992). This method is introduced generally in students' native language but L1 would rarely be used after the lesson introduction; however, meaning is made clear through body movement (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), it was believed that learners should be involved in meaning-focused communicative task (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Although, the use of L1 is not prohibited completely in CLT, judicious use of mother tongue by students and teachers was permitted.

1.3.4 Some research on the teachers and students' perception toward use of L1 in L2 classrooms

By reviewing the related literature, it would become clear that the number of studies related to the attitudes and perception of both teachers and students towards use of L1 in ESL or EFL classes have increased vastly (Mee-ling, 1996; Schweers, 1999; Macaro, 2001; Dash, 2002).

The sociolinguistic characteristics of peer-talk of EFL learners at a preschool were investigated by Wang and Hyun (2009) in Taiwan. They found that learners were engaged in FL learning by using a kind of private speech for self-regulatory speech. They additionally observed that the learners used private speech in both FL and L1 in order to create sentences and structures, to practice pronunciations, to serve as a self-mediation tool and to do learning tasks.

In another study through classroom observations, interviews, and a questionnaire, Tang (2002) empirically investigated English major students and their teachers from China. He observed that the L1 was used by the teachers to explain the meaning of the words, complex ideas, and difficult grammatical points where L1 had a facilitative and supportive role in places L2 explanations did not work. The data from the questionnaires revealed that a high percentage of the students (70%) and the teachers (72%) think that the L1 should be used in the classroom. In addition, lots of the students were satisfied when their teachers used some first language in different situations. Participant students used the L1 mainly to explain difficult concepts or ideas, understanding difficult concepts better, understand jargon and new vocabulary, feel less lost, and improve their translation ability.

In a study conducted by Macaro (2001), six teachers were observed to know about the extent of their use of L1 in the classroom. The amount of L1 use by these teachers was very little. Different observational studies by Dash (2002) revealed that both students and teachers were inclined toward a bilingual approach.

In the case of Prodromou's (2001) study, however, university students were skeptical about the role of L1 (Greek) at the university level. On the contrary, both teachers and students at beginner and intermediate levels have overwhelmingly accepted the use of L1 (Greek) in their English classes.

Bateman (2008) ran a study in which different types of data collection procedures including questionnaires, and interviews were used to gauge students and teachers' attitudes toward L1 use. Results of the study indicated that participants believed in target language use in order to provide students with as much comprehensible input as possible. Activities in which they thought target language should be exclusively used involved vocabulary task, activities dealing with reading and listening materials, giving feedback on students' homework, and warm up activities. They, however, stated that L1 could be used for providing clarification when students did not understand, providing individual help to struggling students and addressing discipline problems.

Another similar study was carried out on students and teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards using Arabic (L1) in Saudi Arabia by Al-Nofaie (2010). The study showed that the students and teachers' attitudes towards using L1 in L2 classroom were positive and the students preferred L1 to be used in certain situations. Teachers emphasized the importance of L1 in their classes. However, they claimed that the untimely and excessive use of L1 should be avoided because it may hinder learning English. In his paper on using L1 in EFL classrooms, Aqel (2006) explored the instructors and students' reactions to using Arabic language in teaching EFL in the Department of English and Modern European languages at the University of Qatar. It was found that all of the instructors felt that it was acceptable to use Arabic in EFL teaching. As for the students' reactions, it was found that 42.85% of freshmen, 54.23% of sophomores, 57.64% of juniors and 61.53% of senior students favored the use of Arabic. The paper recommends a judicious use of Arabic in EFL teaching and when it is the shortest possible way to make learners understand the required points.

As far as the use of L1 in teaching L2 in Iranian context is concerned, Nazary (2008) elicited the attitudes of 85 students at Tehran University towards use of L1 in L2 classes. Students were majoring in different fields of study and were

attending extracurricular English language classes to improve their general English. They were divided into three proficiency levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Based on the results elicited by questionnaire, the author concluded that Iranian university students in an unmistakable divergence from the previous studies were reluctant to use their L1 in L2 classes. They felt that L1 use would certainly decrease the amount of exposure to English, hence hindering language acquisition.

In a similar study, Mahmoudi and Yazdi (2011) carried out a study to investigate the teachers' and learners' perceptions toward the use of L1 in L2 classes. The findings showed that an excessive use of Persian could have a de-motivating effect on students. Hence, the interviewed students voiced their dissatisfaction with the untimely use and domination of L1 in L2 classes. Evidence shows that, for over two decades, there has been an advocacy toward the inclusion of the L1 in the L2 classroom, which goes hand in hand with warning of the negative consequences of its overuse.

1.4 Research Questions

The following questions will derive the present study.

1. What are Iranian university students' perceptions towards the effectiveness of using L1 and L2 in General English classes?
2. What are Iranian EFL instructors' perceptions towards the effectiveness of using L1 and L2 in General English classes?
3. Is there any congruence between EFL instructors' and learners' perceptions towards effectiveness of using L1 and L2 in General English classes?

Based on the third research question, the following null hypothesis is postulated:

H0: There is no difference between EFL instructors' and learners' perceptions towards effectiveness of using L1 and L2 in General English classes.

2. Method of study

2.1 Participants

The survey groups in this study selected to fill out the questionnaires were students and teachers groups. For this purpose, 345 university students (150 males and 195 females) were involved. They were between 18 and 35 years old attending General English classes at the University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. Students were native speakers of Farsi, the official language of Iran and the type of sampling for selection of students and their classes was clustering sampling since they were studying at different faculties of Humanities, Agricultural, Architectural, Physical Education, Technical and Engineering and the faculty of Mathematical Sciences at the University of Guilan. The students were not majoring in English. The reason for selecting these participants is that it seems that it might be required to use Persian at different stages of their General English classes. All of the participants take part in total 14 General English classes in different faculties at the University of Guilan. The classes were held two sessions per week in the second semester of the year for about 4 months similarly.

In the other part of this study, 25 English language instructors (12 males and 13 females) that were between 35 and 55 years old participated in the research. The teacher participants were all M.A. holders and they were graduated in TEFL. All had more than 10 years of English teaching experience while teaching General English at the University of Guilan. Among all of them, 10 teachers were selected to be interviewed.

2.2 Instruments

For the purpose of this study, triangulation has been used for the process of data collection. Therefore, two techniques have been utilized to collect data: questionnaires and interviews. The teacher's perceptions was investigated through both of these data-collection tools, because interviews can allow researchers to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable, such as learners' self-reported perceptions or attitudes (Mackey, A. & Gass, S., 2005). The students' perceptions were only investigated by questionnaires. The questionnaires were validated by a panel of experts. They were faculty members in English department at the University of Guilan. This helped the researcher(s) localize the instrument. The experts provided the researcher with some useful and constructive comments and feedbacks regarding the content, wording and format of some of the items, the near final questionnaires were prepared for the pilot study. After piloting, their Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated, 0.78 and 0.74 for the students and teachers respectively, revealing satisfactory internal consistency and accuracy of the scale. Originally written in English, the students' questionnaire was translated then into Persian for all students. Then its validity was tested. Both groups answered to the same questionnaire consisting of 26 items with 4-point Likert-type scale, except that the wording of those questionnaires was changed appropriately for the students and teachers' groups.

2.3 Data Analysis

This study was of a mixed-method by using both qualitative and quantitative approach. Data analysis consisted of the descriptive statistics to report the results of the survey using frequency distribution, percentage analysis for the first and second questions of the study. There were some reverse items in the questionnaires (items 7, 13 and 16) were considered

in data analysis. In order to answer the third question, Mann-Whitney as a non-parametric test was run as statistical tools to determine any statistically significant difference between the perceptions of the two groups. The alpha for achieving statistical significance was set at .05. In addition, for the qualitative analysis, the researcher utilized the information gathered by the interviews to answer the second question. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Moreover, they were analyzed (classified according to topics). Relevant perceptions were then grouped together and finally used as supplementary sources to support the interpretation, comparison and triangulation of data. The SPSS 16 software was used to analyze the data.

3. Results

In this section, the data collected by the questionnaires, investigating students' and teachers' perceptions toward the use of Persian in General English language classes will be illustrated by the following table. The table presents the percentage and means. Results of the survey provided valuable information that helped to explain the conclusions of the study.

Table 1. Students and teachers' responses to the multiple-choice questions of the survey

n.	Items	<i>strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		<i>agree</i>		<i>strongly agree</i>		Mean	
		T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	S	T
1	I like it when teachers use Persian in General English classrooms to explain grammar rules.	0	7.2	36	16.2	64	47	0	29.6	2.99	2.64
2	I like when teachers use Persian for classroom management (e.g. giving instructions and groupings students).	0	8.4	36	28.1	64	44.9	0	18.6	2.74	2.64
3	I like when teachers use Persian in General English classrooms to explain the meaning of a new vocabulary.	16	11	64	30.1	20	34.5	0	24.3	2.72	2.04
4	When teachers use Persian in English classrooms, students will tend to speak more Persian than English in the classroom.	0	4.1	16	18.6	64	47	20	30.4	3.04	3.04
5	The more the English teacher makes use of Persian, the less effort students make to understand the teacher's use of English.	0	11.6	24	26.1	52	38.3	24	24.1	2.75	3.00
6	I like when teachers use English for explaining simple grammatical terms and concepts and Persian for more difficult terms and concepts.	0	5.8	24	14.5	72	48.7	4	31	3.05	2.80
7	Teachers should not use Persian in English classrooms because it reduces the amount of students' exposure to English.	0	14.2	24	44.1	52	25.8	24	15.9	2.43	3.00
8	The use of Persian should be minimized in General English classrooms.	0	7	24	25.8	52	43.8	24	23.5	2.84	3.00
9	Learners should be	0	16.6	56	31.6	4	22.6	40	22.6	2.52	2.94

	translating the English language into Persian when they read a text.										
10	The only way to learn an English word completely is to know its meaning in Persian.	40	16.2	60	43.5	0	25.2	0	15.1	2.39	1.60
11	I like it when teachers ask me to translate a word or sentence into Persian as a comprehension check.	4	14.2	20	32.2	60	39.4	16	14.2	2.54	2.88
12	I like it when my teacher uses English to give homework in general English class.	0	8.4	36	40.6	64	39.1	0	11.9	2.54	2.64
13	I do not like the use of Persian because it prevents me from thinking in English	0	9.6	32	36.2	48	38.6	20	15.7	2.60	2.88
14	I sometimes speak Persian to my classmates to clarify teacher's directions	4	3.5	44	9.0	44	63.2	8	24.3	3.08	2.56
15	When students speak Persian in the English class, it makes me disappointed.	0	19.7	84	55.9	8	19.4	8	4.9	2.10	2.24
16	I never feel quite sure of myself when students and teachers speak English in the General English class.	8	17.4	92	40.3	0	28.4	0	13.9	2.39	1.92
17	The use of Persian in General English classrooms reduces students' anxiety.	16	5.5	12	26.1	72	48.4	0	20.0	2.83	2.56
18	It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in English in the English class.	0	10.4	4	40.0	80	33.9	16	15.7	2.55	3.12
19	The medium of instruction should be English in the classroom.	0	5.8	20	36.5	68	42.3	12	15.4	2.67	2.92
20	I feel more comfortable when I talk to my teacher in Persian.	0	5.5	12	31.3	88	47.5	0	15.7	2.73	2.88
21	I can understand the lesson much better if the teachers use Persian.	0	6.4	52	27.5	48	50.7	0	15.4	2.75	2.48
22	Persian can help me to express my feelings and ideas that I cannot explain in English.	0	3.2	32	16.8	68	58.6	0	21.4	2.98	2.68
23	I prefer to ask my teacher questions in Persian.	24	8.7	68	30.1	8	44.9	0	16.2	2.69	1.84

24	It is necessary to explain the differences and similarities between Persian and English in Persian.	12	4.6	28	20.3	44	51.9	16	23.0	3.02	2.64		
25	I prefer to use bilingual dictionaries.	0	4.9	56	22.9	44	52.5	0	19.7	2.87	2.44		
26	Estimate the amount of the class time you spend on speaking Persian in General English class	1-20%		21-40%		41-60%		61-80%		81-100%		Mean	
		T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	S	T
		4	13	80	15.1	16	21.2	0	25.5	0	25.2	3.2	2.12

T= teacher S=student

In response to the major items of the questionnaires, 36.5% of the students disagreed, while 68% agreed with the medium of instruction being English. For item 8, the EFL learners agreed (43.8%) and 52% of teachers also agreed that the use of Persian being minimized. Meanwhile, many of the students agreed (44.9%) to ask their teacher questions in Persian in item 23. Most students report that they use Persian for a great amount of the class time (61-100%). According to the item 26, more than eighty percent of the teachers reported that they use L1 only 21-40% of the class time and it shows the high tendency of EFL instructor to English use. For the classroom management, 44.9% of students and 64% of teachers agreed with item 2. but similar results were not concluded for the item 7, contrary to the 60% of the EFL teachers that agreed, most of the students (44.1% disagree and 14.2% strongly disagree) did not believe that teachers' use of Persian reduces the amount of students' exposure to English. for the explaining the similarities and differences between two languages in Persian, 51.9% and 44% of students and teachers respectively agreed with this statement, while, only 4.6% of students strongly disagreed (item 24).

The vast majority of the students chose agree and strongly agree (48.7% and 31% respectively) for the item 6 (mean=3.05). Likewise, 72% of teachers believed that English should be used for explaining the simple grammatical terms and concepts and Persian for the more difficult ones.

In the case of learning the meaning of a new vocabulary, most of the students (34.5%) agree and some other (30.1%) disagree with explaining the meaning in Persian. But the results show that teachers are not willing to use Persian more than English for this case (64% disagree, 16% strongly disagree). While, both groups disagreed (43.5% of students and more than 60% of teachers) that the only way to learn an English word is to know its meaning in Persian (item 10).

Item 25 reads "I prefer to use bilingual dictionaries"; hence, lots of students and teachers agreed on this statement (52.5%). The item number 9 was given to check what the students' and teachers' perceptions is regard to ban the students translating from English to Persian. The results show that 32.2% and 56% of students and teachers indicated disagree respectively. In another similar item (item number 11) they were asked to state their opinion toward translating a word or sentence to Persian as a comprehension check. 32.2 percent of students agreed on this statement while 60% of teachers agreed.

In the items 15 to 18, the students were asked to state their feelings and self-confidence whenever use English in the classroom. Most of them agreed that the use of Persian reduces their anxiety (48.4%) while 72% of teachers agreed on it.

The items 20-22 show that how much Persian is effective for the student in the General English classroom, to the extent that 47.5% of students and 88% of teachers agreed (item 20) that it makes EFL learners to feel more comfortable when they talk in Persian with their teachers. Moreover, for the item 22, majority of the students (58.6%) and teachers (68%) agreed that the use of Persian can help students to express the ideas and feelings that they cannot explain in English.

3.1 Teacher follow-up interview results

Responding to the first question, when the surveyed teachers were asked if they should use Persian in General English class, nine expressed they do not have positive view toward such use. For example, most the interviewees said:

I do not have a strong belief toward L1 use. I think teacher should try not to use it in the classroom because the classroom environment is the only place for the students to be exposed to the target language; rather, the teachers should point out the target language importance and motivate the students to use it in the classroom.

Answering the second question, the teacher participants mentioned that the first language rarely has to be used in General English classes. For example, one interviewee stated, "of course, the amount of L1 use depends on the students' proficiency level and their motivation, but I try to use it very little and sometimes it is inevitable."

Another teacher mentioned "I guess, teachers have to know where to use the first language judiciously and effectively."

The third question was designed to draw information on the view that in what situation teachers prefer to use Persian in the General English classroom. One teacher stated "considering the low proficiency level of the students, I generally use Persian to explain the difficult grammatical points and some terminology and concepts which are very hard for the students. Because I guess it is sometimes useful to contrast the similarity and differences between the two languages in Persian. ". Another teacher added "I think, it is better to teach new words in English but when it comes to some abstract

words the meanings of which are not tangible anymore and for the limited time of the class, it would be fruitful to give students the Persian equivalent as a last resort".

In reacting to the fourth question "In what situations, you prefer to use English?" One teacher added "for the warm-up of the class and also greeting I use English a lot. In teaching new vocabulary, I generally apply different techniques such as: demonstration, acting, drawing, etc...with English language". Other teachers responded "for classroom management, instructions and also doing some activities and tasks, the priority should be given to the English language because teachers should try to involve students, as much as possible".

The fifth question asked teachers Why should teachers use Persian/ English in these situations? According to one teacher "since students spent some period for learning English at the high school level, where teachers were somehow inclined to use Persian, consequently, they should encounter a kind of difference at the university level which is the maximum use of English at the General English classes because teacher is a kind of model and it could stimulate them to use English". Finally many teachers added that EFL teachers should increase their students' motivation by exposing them to the target language. Almost all of the teachers added, they were not willing to use Persian but regarding the low level of the students, L1 could be a supporting tool in general English class. For example, "as far as the first language role is significant in second language learning, using Persian is inevitable because they sometimes use their first language to produce some utterances in the second language".

3.2 Results of the comparison between students' and teachers' perceptions

In order to tab into the third question of the study, investigating the differences or congruence between university students and teachers with regard to their perception toward the use of Persian, mann-whitney was applied as the statistical tool. Tables 2 and 3 Show the results of the analysis.

Table 2. Ranks of the student and teacher groups

	group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Mean Sum	student	345	190.59	65752.50
	teacher	25	115.30	2882.50
	Total	370		

The mean Ranks of the student and teacher groups are given in the table above. As we can see, this table shows that there are 345 and 25 participants in each group respectively. The mean rank of the student group is 190.59 and that of the teacher group is 115.30. To determine the significance of this difference, the result was analyzed more in the next table (see table 3.).

Table 3. Test Statistics for comparison of student and teacher groups

	Mean Sum
Mann-Whitney U	2557.500
Wilcoxon W	2882.500
Z	-3.403
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

According to this table, the observed P-value= .001 is lower than $\alpha=.05$. As a result, the null hypothesis (there is no difference between EFL instructors' and learners' perceptions of effectiveness of using L1 and L2 in General English classes.) was rejected in this study.

4. Discussion

From the descriptive statistics we can conclude that Iranian EFL learners do believe in the effectiveness and importance of L1 use and they are willing to use their mother tongue. In contrast, Iranian EFL teachers have a positive tendency to use more English than Persian in the General English classes.

This study reveals that the majority of the students were interested in using Persian and their perceptions were in line with some other students in the context of other countries (e.g., Al-Nofaie, 2010; Brook-Lewis, 2009). The EFL learners did not ignore the feeling of comfort that Persian can create in General English classes. As Auerbach (1993) stated, "its use reduces anxiety, enhances the affective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates incorporation of learners' life experiences, and allows for learner centered curriculum development" (p.29). Furthermore, the findings are in accordance with some other researches that resorting to L1 is a natural phenomenon (Atkinson, 1987; Harbord, 1992; Nation, 2003). Students in this study asserted that using L1 by their teachers for translating, giving instructions, contrasting the two languages, and explaining grammar are highly favored by them. Duff (1989) indicated the advantages of translation as a language learning activity. He stated that three characteristics which are essential for language learning (flexibility, accuracy, and clarity) can be developed by translation. On the other hand, the positive tendency of university students towards excessive domination of L1 on L2 in general English

classes is against Nazary's (2008) study on a group of students at Tehran University. According to his study Iranian university students are reluctant to use L1 in L2 classes, believing that any amount of using L1 will reduce their exposure to L2. Contrary to this research, the participants of Nazary's study notified that Persian should be used as little as possible in the context of English learning in Iran.

Contrary to the students' view, teachers notified disadvantages of the excessive use of Persian, as their use of L1 depended on their students' specific needs most of the time. However, this study revealed some situations for which the teachers preferred to use Persian. Explaining grammatical terms, introducing abstract words and using L1 sometimes as a comprehension check were the main areas for employing Persian by teachers. Cole (1998) states if students have little or no knowledge of the L2, mother tongue can be applied for explaining the major differences between L1 and L2 and the main grammatical characteristics of L2 that the students should be aware of. The syllabus design and content of the textbook, non-homogeneity of classes in terms of learners' English proficiency, and lack of sufficient time are among the factors pushing the teachers towards a little use of L1. Despite this, they appeared that do not like to use Persian more than English. However, such a stance is in line with Ellis (1984) who argued that L1 use should be decreased as much as possible. But such a view should not be considered a perspective for teaching English in Iran. As Ellis (2008) asserted use of L1 in L2 classes is a factor depending on the "instructional context" (p.801). Furthermore, he pointed out in foreign language contexts, learners' only source exposure to the L2 may be classroom.

The relationship between the students' and teachers' perception is another point to consider. Results show that there was no congruence between their perceptions toward the effective use of L1 and L2 in General English classes.

Insights which emerge from this study of students' and teachers' perceptions in effective incorporation of L1 and L2 are that it is significant to take the learner's viewpoint into account. As Tollefson (2000) asserted "the aims are to empower learners by putting their experiences and knowledge at the center of the pedagogical process" (p.146).

By considering such a mismatch between EFL learners' and students' perceptions in Iranian context especially at university level, it is worth mentioning for teachers, syllabus designers and language policy makers to consider this issue carefully. They should emphasize constructive role of L1 in designing a classroom syllabus, English language teaching methods, classroom management, instructing language learning skills and sub-skills, performing all types of activities and language assessment. Moreover they have to provide all of the facilities for teachers regarding the time and economy.

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