Iranian EFL University Lecturers' and Learners' Attitude towards Using First Language as a Scaffolding Tool in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

The role of EFL lecturers' first language (L1) in the EFL courses has been an ongoing debate. A monolingual approach to EFL suggests that the use of the target language solely in foreign language (FL) classroom improves learning of the target language. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the attitude of Iranian lecturers and EFL learners towards using L1 as a scaffolding tool in reading comprehension. As such, a mixed method design was employed and the data were collected from a sample of 80 Iranian EFL students and 15 lecturers. The quantitative data were collected through two questionnaires and the qualitative data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guided by the research objectives. The findings revealed that the participants perceived the use of L1 (Persian) as a scaffolding tool in their EFL classrooms and it was used to serve a number of purposes: to explain complex grammar, to translate new words, to define concepts, and to help each other in their groups. Moreover, lecturers believed that L1 helps learners' improve EFL learners' reading comprehension. It can be concluded that L1 can be utilized as a scaffolding strategy by learners and lecturers in facilitating their learning and it can be used as a pedagogical tool by the EFL learners to enhance their learning experiences as well as to maximize their engagement in the classroom.

Keywords: First language, scaffolding, reading comprehension, attitudes

Introduction

Reading is one of the most important skills among other skills of second or foreign language (SL/FL) learning. However, despite such a critical role, for a huge number of students, learning to read is an effortful task and a complex process. Among various variables involved in the comprehension of an EFL text is EFL learners' L1 (Day & Bamford, 1998). As Day and Bamford remark, "assuming that students are already literate in their L1, one source of attitudes toward FL/SL reading is the attitude that students have toward reading in their native language" (p. 23).Therefore, the influence or transfer of L1 skills to one's FL/SL has a considerable role in improving EFL learners' performance, especially in reading comprehension. According to Goffman and Cumminings (1997), learner's L1 strategies are transmitted to the English reading comprehension since the educational program is benefited by the learner's native language. Some researchers state that using L1 alongside with FL is facilitative; however, as they argue, this totally depends on characteristics of learners' FL and the L1 process. In addition, it is assumed that L1 may help students as a scaffolding tool in reducing affective barriers and result in teachers' confidence in the classroom (Cohen, 1995). Brown (2000) claims that "L1 can be an encouraging and facilitating factor, and not just an interfering factor" (p. 68). Moreover, as cook

(2007) states, FL learners access their L1 while processing the FL. She suggests that "the FL user doesn't effectively switch off the L1 while processing FL but has it constantly available" (p. 571).

The act of translating can create an ideal learning opportunity with positive L1 use in FL learning. Vygotsky believes that the process of reading is a kind of changing words into sense and inner speech; of his idea is a translation of words into thought. The concepts of scaffolding and zone of proximal development (ZPD) have become outstanding ideas in sociocultural theory because within them is embedded a psycho-social model of teaching and learning (Van lier, 2004). De Guerrero and Villamil (as cited in Poorahmadi, 2009) define scaffolding as "those supportive behaviors by which one partner in a mediated interactive situation can help other achieve higher levels of competence and regulation" (p. 56). By providing enough scaffolding EFL learners reading comprehension ability can be accelerated and gradually they can act alone in similar situations.

One of the scaffolding tools that helps learners in reading comprehension is the translation. The act of translating may be a comprehensive activity which compels learners to pay more attention to the FL text, which enhances their reading and writing. According to Nolasco and Arther (1995), when students use translation they become independent from the teacher, so it can be considered as a scaffolding tool and it is used as to transfer meaning, explain grammar, and organize the class.

It seems that the point which requires special attention is the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students as the key players of FL classes towards using L1. As Prodromou (2002) reports, students at higher levels of study have a negative attitude and lower students had more tendency toward the use of L1 in their classroom. As such, EFL learners' attitude toward using L1 seems to be of great importance in FL learning context.

Attitude can be defined as a psychological tendency to view a particular object or behavior with a degree of favor or disfavor. According to Ellis (as cited in Hashemi & Khalili, 2012), a student's perception toward a language is one of the directing predictors of success in learning it. As a result, teachers and educators should take perception and attitude factors into consideration when designing English language training and instruction. However, negative perception can impede learning a language; it can be changed and transformed to positive ones and facilitate getting a positive result. Furthermore, one of the problems is that some EFL learners believe that when they are not allowed to express their opinions in Persian, they experience fear, insecurity, and low self-esteem. As a result, these students may not be able to participate well in the learning process. So, the primary purpose of the present study was to investigate the attitude of lecturers and learners towards the use of L1 in reading classes. It is believed that the findings give deeper insight into why they use their mother tongue in their English reading classes instead of using English.

Literature Review

A number of studies have considered the attitudes and perceptions toward the L1 use in the classroom (Dash, 2002; Schweers, 1999). 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 Nazari (2008) 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 regarding the use of their mother tongue, Persian, in EFL courses.

According to the related literature, very few studies have been carried out so far, dealing with L1 use, especially at the university level in Iran. Moreover, some research studies in the

realm of the learners' perceptions have resulted in contradictory conclusions and few of them have been run for both teachers' and learners' perceptions in the university context. Due to these confusions, the present researchers were prompted to embark on a study on Iranian university students' and teachers' perceptions to see if using L1 would be facilitative or debilitative in FL reading classes.

In Iran, the mother tongue, Persian, is the formal language of education. All students do their primary education in their mother tongue. If these students could be given an early exposure to the English language, they may confront lots of problems. For example, how learners acquire reading comprehension effectively and efficiently is a demanding issue. EFL learners need to comprehend reading better to speak fluently. Although there are numerous reading strategies, many teachers use some of the tasks like pre-reading, post-reading and FL negotiation in their reading classrooms as a scaffolding tool or they may ask students to memorize the texts; however, it seems that these techniques are not always more effective than translation. Therefore, the challenging problem is to consider whether translation use in EFL learning and teaching is a facilitating or debilitating tool. However, the point which requires special attention is the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students as the key players of FL classes towards using L1 language process. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to deal with translation as a fruitful material in language classes. Having such a purpose in mind, the following research questions were formulated.

1. What are EFL learners' attitudes towards using Persian in EFL reading classrooms?
2. What are EFL lecturers' attitudes towards using Persian in EFL reading classrooms?
3. Are there any differences between EFL learners and lecturers' attitudes towards using Persian in EFL reading classrooms?
4. To what extent do Iranian English learners and lecturers make use of their mother tongue as a learning strategy?

Methodology

Design

The current study employed a mixed-methods design. According to Creswell and Garrett (2008), both qualitative and quantitative data collection are conducted concurrently in a mixed-methods approach. By using this design, the data collection and analysis helped the researchers to find out how EFL Iranian students and lecturers perceive the use of the L1 and the role it plays in the EFL reading classrooms.

Participants

In this study, participants involved 80 males and females English learners and 15 lecturers of Islamic Azad and Sama Universities in Kermanshah, Iran. In this study, the students who were native speakers of Persian were eighteen to twenty-six years old and lecturers were twenty-five to forty. The learners were undergraduate students who were in their first, second, or third semester and the lecturers were all M.A and PhD holders. All lecturers had graduated in TEFL. Of all the participants, three lecturers and five students were interviewed and asked why they sometimes preferred using Persian to English in their classes.

Instrumentation

Two research tools were used for gathering the data: a questionnaire and an interview. The lecturers and students' perceptions were investigated through both of these data-collection tools. It was believed that the interview employed in this study could allow researchers to

investigate phenomena such as learners' self-reported perceptions or attitudes that were not directly observable.

Questionnaires

The researchers surveyed EFL learners' and lecturers' general beliefs and their reasons for the use of Persian in teaching reading texts. These questionnaires had three parts: personal background, guidance, and questions. In students' questionnaire, there were 14 items about the functions of L1 in terms of translating in the EFL/ESL classroom based on (Bhooth, Azman & Ismail, 2014; Tang, 2002). Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of occurrence on a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly disagree).

The lecturers' questionnaire included 15 items about their attitudes towards L1 use in reading comprehension classes. It was adopted from Rabani, Bijarzehi and Ehsanjoo, (2014). The choices which were respectively used in the questionnaire were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree.

The lecturers were asked to show their attitudes towards each of the following categories: 1) General attitude: teachers and students' general attitudes toward using Persian in teaching reading texts, and 2) Teachers and students' reason: their reasons for using L1 in teaching reading texts including: a) Affective and metacognitive aspects: beliefs about the positive effects of using L1 on learners' affective and metacognitive aspects, and b) Beliefs about the effects of L1 on enhancing learners' English skills and classroom interaction.

Interview

For the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 3 lecturers and 5 students from the total participants to gain a better understanding of their L1 use with respect to reading practices. The participants were randomly selected. Semi-structured interviews involved pre-determined questions prepared in advance. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to prompt and probe deeper understanding during the interview sessions. Each interview lasted approximately 5-10 minutes. Moreover, these questions, which had been derived from Mahmodi and Amirkhiz (2011), were asked in Persian.

Procedure

As explained before, 80 university students and 15 lectures of Islamic Azad and Sama universities took part in the study. Of the 90 questionnaires given to students, 80 were returned. The questionnaire items focused on the subjects' opinions toward the use of L1, the various occasions when they think L1 can be used, and the perceived effectiveness of L1 in their EFL classroom.

It should be stated that the questionnaires were piloted on a sample group of 5 lecturers and 5 students to ensure the clarity of the items. The data obtained from the questionnaire which had 14 items in students' and 15 items in lecturers' questionnaires were analyzed by assigning the values 1 to 5 and 1 to 4 to the choices they made. Having scored the administrated questionnaires, the researchers analyzed the data through statistical procedures being elaborated in the subsequent section.

As for the attitude and perceptions of teachers and students, one-to-one interviews were conducted with three teachers and five students. The interviews were recorded and summarized. The three lecturers, who were two females and one male, were asked why they sometimes preferred using Persian to teach readings in their classes. These questions were:
1. How often do you use Persian in your EFL reading classes?

2. Why should teachers use Persian in reading courses?

Interviewing with these five students revealed that all of the students were supportive of using L1 in some conditions. In fact, the following questions were asked from students.

1. Do you translate to Persian in EFL reading classroom to comprehend the texts?

2. Should lecturers and students use L1 in EFL courses?

In general, the data collection of questionnaires and interview took place in the course of two months. The interviews were transcribed in order to be reexamined at later stages.

Results

The First Research Question

The first research question aimed to address the learners' attitudes towards L1 use in reading comprehension classes. Table 1 shows the details of the data obtained for this purpose.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Questionnaire

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I understand better when the teacher uses Persian to explain complex grammar points.	F 18 P22.5%	F 39 P48.75%	F 21 P26.25%	F 3 P3.75%
2. Using Persian is useful to understand complex instructions.	F 13 P16.25%	F 32 P 40%	F 25 P31.25%	F 11 P13.75%
3.Using Persian is helpful in explaining difficult concepts	F 21 P26.25%	F 33 P41.25%	F 14 P17.5%	F 12 P15%
4.Using Persian helps me arrive at the meaning of English language	F 13 P16.2%	F 32 P 40%	F 26 P32.5%	F 9 P11.25%
5.Using Persian is useful for defining new vocabulary items	F 11 P13.75%	F 27 P 33.75%	F 29 P 36.25%	F 13 P 16.25%
6. Using Persian is useful to express myself when I do not have the appropriate English words.	F 10 P 12.5%	F 26 P 32.5%	F 28 P 35%	F 16 P 20%
7.Using Persian is useful when carrying out group work	F 11 P13.75%	F 29 P 36.25%	F 25 P 31.25%	F 15 P 18.75%

	SA	A	D	SD
8. Using Persian helps me bring on my personal experiences and background knowledge	F 16 P 20%	F 25 P 31.25%	F 26 P 32.5%	F 13 P 16.25%
9. Using Persian is useful when checking for comprehension	F 11 P 13.75%	F 32 P 40%	F 22 P 27.5%	F 15 P 18.75%
10. Using Persian enables us to provide each other with help in the class	F 16 P 20%	F 33 P 41.25%	F 18 P 22.5%	F 13 P 16.25%
11. Using Persian is useful to ask friends/ classmates for clarification	F 10 P 12.5%	F 36 P 45 %	F 18 P 22.5%	F 16 P 20%
12. Using Persian helps me progress from what you I can do with the help of peers to what I can do alone	F 9 P11.25%	F 32 P 40%	F 24 P 30%	F 15 P 18.75%
13. I understand how to use reading strategies better when the teacher explains these strategies in Persian	F 12 P 15%	F 26 P 32.5%	F 32 P 40%	F 10 P 12.5%
14. Using Persian is useful when I want to ask for clarification from the Teachers	F 18 P 22.5%	F 25 P 31.25%	F 26 P 32.5%	F 11 P 13.75%

Note: F stands for frequency and P for percentage

Besides Table 1, which shows the details of the answers provided by the students to the questionnaire, Table 2 shows a summary of all the responses to the four options of the questionnaire.

Table2. Descriptive Statistics of Frequency and Percentage

SA	A	D	SD
F 200	F 427	F 334	F 172
P 262.5 %	P 533.75%	P 417.5%	P 215%

The findings revealed that the Iranian EFL students perceive the use of Persian as a useful facilitating tool in their learning of EFL. As shown in the tables above, a high percentage of

respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the usefulness of Persian in the class. The frequency and percentages of respondents who strongly agreed and agreed, in rank order, were as follows: [1] to explain complex grammar points (57, 71.25%), [3] ... in explaining difficult concepts (54, 61.5%), [10] using Persian enables us to provide each other with help in the class (49, 61.25%), [11] ... to ask friends/classmates for clarification (46, 57.5%), [4] ... helps me arrive at the meaning of the English language (45, 56.25%), [2] using Persian is useful to understand complex instruction (45, 56.25%), [14] ... is useful to ask teachers for clarification (43, 53.75%), [9] ... is useful when checking for comprehension (43, 53.75%), [8] ... helps me bring on my personal experiences and background knowledge into class (41, 51.25%), [12] ... helps me progress from what I can do with the help of peers to what I can do alone (41, 51.25%), [7] ... is useful when carrying out group work (40, 50%), [13] I understand how to use reading strategies better when the teacher explains these strategies in Persian (38, 47.5%), [5]… is useful for defining new vocabulary items (38,47.5%), and [6] ... is useful to express myself when I do not have the appropriate English words (36, 45%).

All in all, the results indicated that student perceived the use of Persian in the reading classroom as useful because they believed it helped them understand difficult grammar points, the instructions, and new concepts, and translate new words.

Students' Reasons for Using L1
How often do you use L1 in your English classes and why should teachers use Persian in these situations?

Student 1: "Of course, especially when we don't understand some words. So, sometimes we need to translate to understand and I prefer to translate difficult words. Furthermore, L1 helps me in describing complex concepts. In my opinion, if L1 is used by teachers and lecturers is better."

Student 2: "When we have problem with some difficult points, especially, grammar lecturers should use Persian. In reading class, I wish lecturers use Persian when I don't understand the meanings of words."

Student 3: "It is not Ok to use L1 for every words and concepts; however, it is helpful for me in comprehending difficult words and concepts."

Student 4: "Using L1 in explaining grammar and getting help from my background knowledge is really helpful and sometimes we need some explanations in Persian. Therefore, teachers must use L1espacially in lower levels."

The Second Research Question
The second research question was aimed at probing into the lecturers' attitudes towards using L1 in reading comprehension classes. The results are presented in the following tables:

Table 3. Descriptive Statistic of Lecturers' Questionnaire

Questionnaire Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Using L1 is inevitable in teaching reading texts	F 3 P 20 %	F 7 P 46%	F 2 P 13.3%	F 2 P 13.3%	F 1 P 6.6%

2. Translation can be used as ateaching/learning strategy in teaching reading texts.	F 4 P 26.6%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 2 P 13.3%	F 4 P 26.6%	F 0 P 0%
3. The use of Persian in teaching reading texts may interfere with learner's ability to learn English well.	F 1 P 6.6%	F 4 P 26.6%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 3 P 20%	F 2 P 13.3%
4. UsingL1 in teaching reading comprehension texts facilitates learner's comprehension.	F 4 P 26.6%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 0 P 0%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 1 P 6.6%
5. Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts increases learner's achievement in reading comprehension tests.	F 2 P 13.3%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 2 P 13.3%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 1 P 6.6%
6. If students receive translation of the gist in Persian after reading the passage, it has positive effect on their comprehension.	F 2 P 13.3%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 6 P 40%	F 0 P 0%	F 2 P 13.3%
7. Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension	F 1 P 6.6%	F 6 P 40%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 1 P 6.6%	F 2 P 13.3%

texts enhances learner's involvement in learning process.					
8. Translation of the text can be used for conveying meaning .i.e. checking the meaning of new words, idioms and expressions and sentences in a text.	F 1 P 6.6%	F 7 P 46%	F 2 P 13.3%	F 3 P 20%	F 2 P 13.3%
9. L1 can be used in teaching reading comprehension texts to save class time.	F 0 P 0%	F 2 P 13.3%	F 4 P 26.6%	F 7 P 46%	F 2 P 13.3%
10. L1 can help students to check whether their comprehension is correct or not.	F 2 P 13.3%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 3 P 20%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 0 P 0%
11. Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts changes the environment of the classes from teacher dominant to student centered.	F 1 P 6.6%	F 0 P 0%	F 6 P 40%	F 3 P 20%	F 4 P 26.6%
12. Translating reading comprehension texts increases interaction between teacher and learners.	F 1 P 6.6%	F 3 P 20%	F 2 P 13.3%	F 6 P 40%	F 3 P 26.6%

13. Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts creates non-threatening environment in the classroom.	F 1 P 6.6%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 6 P 40%	F 3 P 20%	F 0 P 0%
14. Using L1 increases students' self confidence in answering comprehension questions.	F 1 P 6.6%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 5 P 33.3%	F 3 P 20%	F 1 P 6.6%
15. Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts enhances student's motivation and interest for learning.	F 0 P 0%	F 3 P 20%	F 6 P 40%	F 6 P 40%	F 0 P 0%

In addition to Table 3, which shows the details of the answers provided by the lecturers to the questionnaire, Table 4 shows a summary of all the responses to the five options of the questionnaire.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Frequency and Percentage

SA	A	Neither A nor D	D	SD
F 24	F 65	F 56	F 56	F 21
P 159.3%	P 445%	P 373%	P 373%	P 146%

Lecturers' Reasons for Using L1 in Teaching Reading Texts
Do you use Persian in reading classroom? Should lecturers and students use L1 in English classes?
      Lecturer 1: The main reason I use Persian in the classroom is that sometimes students — because of their low proficiency level in English—can't follow me when I only use English to explain the meaning of the text or to give instructions. Also, when I know an appropriate Persian translation of an English sentence, I will give it to students so they can immediately comprehend

the meaning of the English sentence. This also helps them to increase their self confidence in answering the question.

Lecturer 2: The use of some Persian in the class actually provides more time for students to practice their English and get exposure to English. I think using some Persian is more effective. Occasionally, when you spend quite some time or use several English sentences to explain one word or idea, and the students still look confused; using one simple Persian word or idiom might solve the problem. Moreover, the amount of English used depends on the students' language proficiency level. If their English is at an advanced level, I feel no need to use Persian. All in all, I think that using some Persian in the classroom is necessary.

Lecturer 3: Sometimes when students seem perplexed after my English explanation of certain points, I use Persian to reinterpret them. I use Persian to discuss the meaning of some difficult, abstract words and to explain the grammar and ideas expressed in long and complicated sentences. Furthermore, when the classroom is noisy, using Persian to keep order is more effective than using English.

In Table 5 below, the students' and lecturer's mean scores are juxtaposed and compared:

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Lecturers and Students' Questionnaire

Descriptive Statistics	
Student's Mean	Teacher's Mean
51.37 (64.21%)	9.08 (65%)

Regarding the lecturers' and students' reasons for the effect of using Persian on students' language skills, most of them (i.e. 64.21% of the students and 65% of the teachers) believed that using L1 has a facilitating role on learners' reading comprehension skill.

Table 5 shows that a high percentage of the students (64.21%) and the lecturers (65%) who participated in the study think that Persian should be used in the classroom and it can be stated that there is no difference between them. According to the students, Persian was most necessary to explain complex grammar points (71.25 %) and to help explain difficult concepts (61.5%). For teachers, Persian was most necessary and inevitable in teaching reading texts (66%), facilitates learner's comprehension (59.9%) and it can be used for conveying meaning of words, idioms (52.6%). Only one or two teacher indicated that Persian changes the environment of the classes from teacher dominated to student-centered.

Discussion

The purpose of the current paper was to investigate the use of L1 in the EFL reading classroom. The findings indicated that the use of students' L1 in the EFL reading classroom had a facilitating role rather than impeding. The results indicated that Persian was commonly used in the EFL classroom for a range of purposes i.e. to understand some grammar points, instructions, difficult concepts, new vocabulary; to express themselves when they did not have the appropriate English vocabularies, and when carrying out group work; and to check for comprehension. This finding is in line with the findings of other studies (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Tang, 2002) in the contexts of Australia, Saudi, and China. These studies revealed that students use and prefer their teachers to use L1 for targeted purposes. The finding also suggests that the use of Persian may usefully

serve social and cognitive functions, including scaffolding, and promoting collaborative work to improve language learning.

The results of the present study on the use of the mother tongue in Iranian EFL context bear many similarities to Schweer's study (1999), which showed that teachers and students responded positively towards the use of L1 in SL classes. Similarly, only few of the teachers shared the view that using L1 in teaching reading texts might interfere with learners' ability to learn English well.

This finding revealed the fact that most of the lecturers supported the use of Persian in teaching reading comprehension texts in EFL classes. Thus the findings of the study are in line what Kern (1994), who investigated the effect of translation as a technique on learners' reading comprehension proficiency and understanding the target language text.

Therefore, the study suggests that the use of the Persian may be beneficial in the EFL class, especially when students have difficulty in understanding. Using Persian may represent that both students and the teacher share something in common. This concurs with Cook (2001) who argues that treating L1 as a classroom resource opens up several ways to use it. The teacher can use L1 to convey meaning, explain grammar, and organize the class. Students can also use L1 as part of their collaborative learning and individual strategy use. Thus, the teacher can use L1 as a pedagogical tool to facilitate the teaching and learning of English as a FL. These findings confirm that the use of the students' L1, Persian language in this case, is effective for the nonnative speakers of English particularly in helping them comprehend their reading materials.

The use of L1 was perceived as useful by the EFL students for their learning in the English reading classroom. In fact the students regarded the use of Persian as a learning strategy to translate new words, define concepts, and help each other in their groups. Although students perceived the use of Persian as useful and of great help in the reading classroom, they were aware of the fact that the overuse of Persian was harmful and might impede their English language development. They believe that it is better that lecturers should only use Persian when they have difficulty in understanding in English.

The finding of this paper also supports Atkinson's (1987) claim of mother tongue use in EFL context. Three reasons are offered for allowing limited LI use in the classroom: 1) it is a 'learner-preferred strategy'. Given the opportunity, learners will choose to translate without encouragement from the teacher. 2) The use of mother tongue is a humanistic approach. It means that permits them to say what they want when they do not have the appropriate English. 3) L1 strategies are efficient in terms of time spent explaining to achieve a specific aim. As discussed above, the findings showed that students and lecturers prefer to use Persian for a number of functions. However, it is not easy to decide when and how appropriately it should occur in the EFL classroom because it depends on the classroom situation. Hence, the finding of the study reported reiterates the role of the L1 as a supportive and facilitating tool and there is no difference between lecturers and students points of view. Therefore, L1 should only be used as a supportive means used to ensure progress in the acquisition of the target language. The implication for this is that the EFL lecturers should support this view of purposeful but limited use of the L1 in order to facilitate student learning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it could be concluded that L1, in this case the Persian language, could be used by students as a learning strategy i.e. to translate new vocabularies, define concepts, help each other in their groups and explain grammar. Likewise, L1 could be used by the teacher as a pedagogical strategy to facilitate student learning and to maximize their engagement

in the classroom. In this study, the lecturers were aware of the disadvantages of the excessive use of Persian, as their use of Persian depended on their students' specific needs most of the time. They preferred to use it with beginner learners to help them understand the new language. However, lecturers should make sure that students are not extremely dependent on L1. This balance should be beneficial in student's proficiency in the target language and decreasing the dependence of L1.

This study indicated that lecturers mostly had positive views on using L1 in teaching FL reading texts. The study provided a detailed description and analysis of teacher's general attitudes and their reasons for using L1 in EFL reading classrooms. The beneficial role of L1 in creating a calm environment in the classrooms, enhancing the learners' motivation and interest in learning language, increasing their involvement and achievement in learning process and conveying the meaning of new words and idioms were the lecturers' main reasons for using Persian in teaching FL reading texts. It is also noteworthy that despite the lecturers' flexibility in using Persian in some situations, they appeared to be strict about allowing their students to ask questions in Persian.

This study also found that students and lecturers have various attitudes and reasons for using the L1 in the reading classroom. Participants in the face-to-face interviews agreed that they sometimes used the L1 to explain and ask about the new concepts presented in English classes, to explain grammar and difficult concepts, and to clarify something when they felt they could not find the correct word in English. Moreover, the study revealed the reasons for which the lecturers used Persian including introducing new vocabulary and giving exam.

Based on the findings, the proficiency level of the learners is another determining factor in using the L1 by the learners. In other words, the higher the level of the participants, the more they were willing to use English only in the classroom. With lower level English students, it was clear the EFL learners relied more on the L1 to express themselves and they felt more nervous when asked to use English in the English classrooms.

Although no generalizations could be made from this single study, it reveals the variety of students and lecturers' beliefs about the use of L1 in teaching FL reading comprehension texts. The complexity of the L1 issue has illustrated the value and importance of investigating the issues, and more qualitative and quantitative studies need to be undertaken to deepen our understanding of teacher beliefs about the use of L1 in teaching FL reading texts.

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