

Examining Pre-service ESL Teacher Beliefs: Perspectives on First Language Use in the Second Language Classroom

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Abstract

Although research into the use of the first language (L1) in second language (L2) learning has grown in strength in recent years, the majority of ESL teacher-training courses still provide little to no information regarding L1 use in L2 teaching. This paper investigates the perspectives of pre-service ESL teachers regarding the use of the L1 in L2 learning, the potential reasons underpinning these views, and what, if any, further education is needed in ESL teacher training courses regarding L1 use in the L2 classroom. The results of this study suggest that, although the pre-service teacher participants were accepting of L1 use at times, their acceptance was limited, implying a lack of a complete understanding overall. The author recommends ESL teacher-training courses equip future teachers with more information regarding L1 use in L2 learning so that they can to make their own informed decisions on effective L1 use in their classrooms.

Keywords: first language; second language; pre-service teachers; ESL teacher training; ESL teacher beliefs

Introduction

The question of whether or not the first language (L1) should be used in second language (L2) learning has long been highly debated in the field of L2 education. The major shortcoming of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), recognized in the 1940s, was that use of the L1 through translation did not lead to communicative competence in the target language (TL), which ultimately resulted in uneasiness towards L1 use in L2 learning (Karimian & Mohammadi, 2015). Similar ideologies of distrust towards the L1 continue to surround many of the dominant L2 teaching methods today, with approaches such as the Direct Method and some interpretations of Communicative Language Teaching¹ (CLT) actively excluding or discouraging its use in the L2 classroom (Cummins, 2007; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009).

Recognising that the use of learners' L1 in the L2 classroom is still viewed negatively by many teachers and institutions of English as a second language (ESL) throughout the world, some

¹ Although it must also be acknowledged that some forms of CLT, such as Task-Based Learning and Teaching, can involve strategic use of the L1 for certain aspects of tasks.

scholars have suggested that the reasons for exclusive use of the L2 in language learning are more politically and commercially-grounded than based on pedagogical research and theory, and thus may not be as beneficial to students' learning as portrayed (Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 2010). Mahboob and Lin (2016) add to this, claiming that the non-recognition of L1 use in dominant L2 teaching practices is a misconception resulting from the environment and conditionsⁱ in which these pedagogies were developed, and is not the product of well-grounded research in the field. In recent years, some scholars (e.g. Macaro, 2014; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain 2009) have challenged the prominent ideologies of the past, which advocate against the use of the L1, acknowledging a learner's L1 as a vital tool that serves a number of social and cognitive functions to aid and facilitate L2 learning.

Although the research behind L1 use in the L2 classroom has grown in strength in recent years (Ellis & Shintani, 2014), the majority of ESL teacher training courses still provide little to no information regarding L1 use in the L2 classroom (Lasagabaster, 2013), and little research has been conducted regarding pre-service ESL teachers' perceptions on the matter as a result. It is also interesting to investigate how the use of the L1 in L2 learning is represented in pre-service training courses. A review of the syllabi from some of the major TEFL/TESOL course providers throughout the world (e.g. the International TEFL Academy, BridgeTEFL, TESOL International Association, the American TESOL Institute, etc.) found no explicit references to the use of the L1 in the ESL teaching process. Although both the Cambridge CELTA and Trinity College CertTESOL syllabi did mention the use of the L1, their focus remains on developing an awareness of how learners' L1 can affect and influence their learning of English, not on how teachers can effectively utilize the L1 to enhance their teaching and students' learning. This relative absence of valuable information regarding the role and use of the L1 suggests that modern pedagogies and teaching strategies currently taught in pre-service ESL teacher training programmes do not actively employ or encourage the use of the L1. This leaves pre-service teachers 'in the dark', so to speak, regarding how best to effectively utilise the L1 to maximise their L2 teaching. This study sets out to investigate the views of pre-service ESL teachers regarding use of the L1 in L2 classrooms, the potential reasons underpinning these views, and what, if any, further education is needed in ESL teacher training courses regarding L1 use in the L2 classroom.

Literature Review

Students' use of the L1

The beneficial role of the L1 use in L2 learning has become a topic of interest amongst scholars of second language acquisition (SLA) in recent years (see for example Brooks-Lewis,

2009; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins, 2007; Lin, 2015; Macaro, 2014; Scott & de la Fuente, 2008; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain 2009). Learners’ use of their L1 is a natural psycholinguistic practice that helps to facilitate L2 acquisition (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Cook, 2010). Cook (2002) suggests that, because a learner’s L1 is ever present in their mind and continuously accessed throughout the L2 learning process, there is no logical reason why it should be avoided in the L2 classroom. Storch and Aldosari’s (2010) study of 36 university-level Arabic EFL learners found that the L1 serves a multitude of social, cognitive and pedagogical functions, and that dismissing or prohibiting its use in the L2 classroom restricts the L2 teaching possibilities; effectively turning a blind eye to a valuable teaching and essential learning tool. Cook (2001) claims that the L1 can be used to build interlinked knowledge of the L1 and L2 in the learners’ minds, and that ‘bringing the L1 back from exile may lead not only to the improvement of existing teaching methods but also to innovations in methodology’ (p. 419).

Socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) states that human cognitive activity, and therefore language acquisition, develops through interpersonal social interaction. In L2 learning, it has been suggested that collaboration and interaction between students can be initiated and sustained through use of the L1 (Brooks & Donato, 1994), and impeded through exclusive use of the L2 (Scott & de la Fuente, 2008). Antón and Dicamilla’s (1999) study into the use of the L1 by 10 adult learners of beginner Spanish in a collaborative writing task found that interaction in the L1 allows L2 learners to enlist and maintain one another’s interest in a task, discuss and develop task-solving strategies, and build on each other’s suggestions to reach an eventual resolution as a group. The use of the L1 also promotes collaboration and facilitates L2 learning through the notion of scaffolding (Bhooth, Azman, & Ismail, 2014; Carless 2008; Meyer 2008).

Jadallah and Hasan (2011) advise that the L1 must be used strategically at ‘appropriate times and in appropriate places’ (p. 7). Mohebbi and Alavi (2014) add to this, arguing that ‘selective and principled code-switching in L2 learning classroom contexts should be seen as a reflection of bilingual and multilingual speakers’ practices in everyday life’ (p. 58). This strategic use of the L1 has been found to be an effective tool in developing skills in each of the four language domains. Al Masaeed’s (2016) study into the use of the L1 by learners of Arabic during L2 speaking activities found that learners employed the L1 as a mediating tool to cultivate communication in the L2, to maintain interactive flow of the conversation, and to warm up and determine discussion topics. Harris (2001)’s study into the L2 listening strategies of EFL learners involved having learners employ their L1 during post-listening brainstorming to discuss the listening strategies they had employed, and found that this allowed learners to identify new

strategies and understand the value widening the range of listening strategies they use. Turnbull and Sweetnam Evans' (2017) study into the reading skills of Japanese ESL students found that L1 group discussions about L2 texts not only lead to a deeper comprehension of the texts overall, but also allowed learners to engage in higher-order processing and reading comprehension strategies. Wang and Wen's (2002) study into the use of the L1 by Chinese EFL learners during L2 writing tasks found that learners employed the L1 to generate and organise their ideas, and to manage their own writing processes. Beyond these four main language domains, the use of the L1 has also been shown to help learners understand new L2 vocabulary (Liu, 2008) and complex grammar points (Demir, 2012), develop and build learners' confidence (Phakiti, 2006), lower affective filters (Meyer, 2008), ease stress and anxiety levels (Levine, 2003), offer a sense of security (Schweers, 1999), and make up for learners' limitations in the process of L2 learning (Corder, 1981).

Teachers' use of the L1

Ellis and Shintani (2014) state that, even today there is a 'relative absence of any reference to the L1 in teacher guides' (p. 228). This gap in teacher training programs means that newly emerging L2 teachers have not been formally prepared to understand how or when to use the learners' L1 in their teaching (Mahboob & Lin, 2016). Consequently, the historically-held negative view of L1 use in the L2 learning continues to impact the way in which teachers treat the learner's L1, with many teachers feeling guilty about using the L1 in the classroom (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Gaebler, 2014). Hosoda (2000) even states that 'the TL-only notion is still so powerful that EFL/ESL teachers who admit that they use the students' L1 in their classes are usually apologetic' (pp. 69-70). Despite these feelings of wrongdoing, however, research into teacher code-switching has found consistent patterns in which ESL teachers opt to employ the learners' L1 in the L2 classroom. Inbar-Lourie's (2010) study investigated the use of students L1 by six teachers of young EFL learners in both Hebrew and Arabic medium schools. She found three main categories in which L2 teacher's employed the L1, namely, for instructional purposes, including facilitating comprehension and explaining complex grammar; managerial purposes, including task, classroom, and concept management; and affective purposes, including encouragement, positive feedback, fortifying positive achievements and restoring the flow of interaction after negative responsiveness.

It is important to note that teachers' use of the L1 does not necessarily mean exclusive use of the learner's native language, nor does it mean allowing the students to do the same. Rather, it means strategic employment of the L1 to assist students' learning and to facilitate teaching on the whole. Aside from the direct functions for which the L1 can be utilized in the classroom

— for example, translating and clarifying in the students' native language — when used in a strategic and purposive manner, the L1 provides a number of indirect benefits that underpin and facilitate students' L2 learning 'behind-the-scenes'. Research has suggested that the L1 can be used appropriately as a mediating tool (Bhooth, Azman, & Ismail, 2014) to improve classroom dynamics and provide a sense of security (Schweers, 1999), to establish social relationships and build rapport (Littlewood & Yu, 2011), to make students feel comfortable in the classroom (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009), and to remove unnecessary worries whilst building students' confidence (Karimian & Mohammadi, 2015). These indirect benefits are often overlooked as an acceptable means of utilising the L1 in the L2 classroom, but are as equally important to students' learning because they support students' affective attitudes towards the learning process as a whole.

Pre-service teacher beliefs

In spite of both the direct and indirect benefits that research has suggested regarding L1 use in the L2 classroom, there is a significant lack of research on pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs regarding the matter. William and Burden (1997) categorised language teachers' beliefs as being related to (1) language learning, (2) language learners, and (3) language teachers themselves; all three of which involve the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. Borg (2001) defines a teacher belief as:

...a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior (p. 186).

It is widely accepted that pre-service teachers bring with them experiences, ideas and theoretical beliefs to training programs that have significant effects on how they view teaching practices and make instructional decisions (Farrell & Bennis, 2013). Their beliefs concerning language teaching often originate from their own second language learning experiences (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001), summarised by Heaton and Mickelson (2002) with the statement: 'teachers teach the way they were taught' (p. 51). This notion has also been referred to as the 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975), and has significant implication on teachers' practices in the classroom. Numrich's (1996) study of 26 pre-service ESL teachers enrolled in a Master's degree TESOL programme found that the participating teachers would actively promote or avoid certain instructional strategies based on their own positive or negative experiences of such strategies as learners themselves. Language teachers' pre-held beliefs act as a lens through which they implement their teaching practices, but also serve as

a barrier that may impede their own professional development and learning (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). Hence, Holec (1987) argues that “EFL pre-service teachers should go through a process of ‘deconditioning’ to rid themselves of preconceived prejudices which would likely interfere with their language teaching” (p. 27).

Zheng (2009) suggests that pre-service teachers often hold “inappropriate, unrealistic or naïve’ understandings of teaching and learning” (p. 78). However, whilst pre-service teachers often hold such beliefs about how foreign languages are taught and learned, few are actually aware of their own beliefs and the effect they can have on their own teaching practices (Farrell & Bennis, 2013). It is therefore important for pre-service ESL teachers to be made aware of their own pre-held beliefs to reflect on and, if necessary, change said beliefs and practices to avoid potentially detrimental effects on students’ language learning.

Methodology

Research focus

Previous studies have examined the beliefs of pre-service L2 teachers regarding L2 learning and teaching in general (see for example Brownlee, Prudie & Boulton-Lewis, 2001; Busch, 2010; Peacock, 2001; Wong, 2010), as well as the views of in-service L2 teachers specifically towards the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom (see for example Anh, 2010; Hawkins, 2015; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Levine, 2003; Manara, 2007). However, a review of the current literature suggests that none have specifically investigated the perspectives of pre-service teachers regarding L1 use in the L2 classroom. The present study aims to address this issue by investigating the views and opinions of pre-service ESL teachers regarding the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom, the potential reasons underpinning these views, and what, if any, further education is needed in ESL teacher training courses regarding L1 use in the L2 classroom. To do so, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What are the opinions of pre-service teachers towards the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom?
2. To what extent are pre-service ESL teachers influenced by historic views of L1 use in L2 teaching?
3. What implications does this knowledge have for pre-service training courses in the future?

Participants

The present study involved 30 (M=11, F=19) undergraduate students (see Appendix 1) studying TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at a New Zealand university. 25 of the participants were native English speakers. Two were Korean/English bilingual natives, and three were non-native speakers (2 Chinese, 1 Vietnamese) with advanced levels of ESL proficiency. 21 of the participants were aged between 20-25 years old, with four younger and five older than this category. 25/30 participants had experience in learning a second language (Japanese, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Maori, Thai, English, Afrikaans, Ancient Greek) at secondary and/or tertiary level to various degrees of proficiency in various countries (New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, France, Canada, USA, China, South Africa, Korea, England, Vietnam). 5/30 participants claimed to have had some previous L2 teaching experience, all of which occurred overseas in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in China, Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam (see Appendix 1 for further details regarding these experiences).

The participants were enrolled in two courses: Advanced TESOL, a theory based class, and/or TESOL Practicum, a practical based class, both of which require students to have previously taken and passed an introductory TESOL class. All participants were thus thought to have a basic and fundamental understanding of TESOL prior to the present study. 25/30 participants had completed the prerequisite TESOL paper within the previous 12 months. The remaining 5 participants had completed it within the past 24 months. All participants agreed to take part in the project voluntarily. These participants were selected because of their shared background in the study of TESOL at the same institution. Furthermore, the perspectives of pre-service teachers was investigated as opposed to in-service teachers in order to develop a gauge on the pre-held beliefs that teachers bring with them to teacher training courses regarding L1 use, and how this may affect their future teaching practices if they are otherwise uneducated on the matter. Although it is also important to investigate this matter amongst in-service teachers, the fact that no previous studies have looked specifically at pre-service teachers' perceptions of L1 use in the L2 classroom motivated the choice of participants in the present study.

Questionnaire

A written questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was administered to all 30 participants at the beginning of their course, and was completed and returned the same day. The survey contained a series of questions regarding the use of the L1 in the L2 learning process from both the teacher's and students' point of view. The participants were asked to rank given scenarios and/or pedagogical concepts on a 5-point Likert scale based on their own

perspectives, and why they believe this to be the case. The Likert scale was, in general, based on five sections: *always*, referring to 76-100% of the time, *often*, indicating to 51-75% of the time, *sometimes*, referring to 26-50% of the time, *seldom*, referring to 1-25% of the time, and *never*, indicating 0% of the time. The questions in the survey were specifically designed so as to develop a gauge on how the pre-service participants view the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom and, in particular, the extent of their knowledge regarding how the L1 can be utilized to aid and facilitate L2 learning.

As part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked questions related to how often they believe learners of each level should be allowed to use their L1; how beneficial use of the L1 can be to each level of proficiency, as well as each of the four language domains; how useful both the teacher's and learner's use of the L1 can be in given situations; whether or not they agree with L1 exclusion in the L2 classroom; and, whether or not they think they know enough about L1 use in L2 learning.

Results

Student vs teacher use of the L1

In general, participants of the present study were accepting of L1 use on the students' behalf. The majority of participants (57%) claimed the L1 could be used by students at least 'sometimes' to aid L2 learning, with 40% stating its use could be 'often'. Only one participant claimed its use should be 'seldom'. Participants' justifications of such claims regarding how often the L1 could be of benefit to L2 learning were limited to two main areas: 1.) for making interlanguage connections, and 2.) for clarification and explanation. Exactly half of the participants made explicit reference to the benefit of identifying interlanguage similarities and differences between a learner's L1 and L2, as seen through such comments as:

P3: *You can use differences and similarities between L1 and English to help you learn.*

P9: *Learners can find patterns between their language and the L2.*

57% of the participants referred to the role of the L1's in clarification and explanation, including comments such as:

P6: *Using L1 to clarify what is meant in L2 can help.*

P17: *Could use for clarifying concepts/words they don't know.*

Two participants' comments suggested clarification to be the *only* role of the L1 in L2 learning:

P4: *The L1 would not provide benefit except to clarify certain ideas.*

P16: *To clarify points, the L1 is helpful, but for nearly everything else, the L1 use may cause confusion.*

On the other hand, participants suggested that teacher's use of the learners' L1 should be less frequent than that of the students, with 73% claiming that the teacher should only 'seldom' use the learners' L1 in the L2 classroom, and the other 27% indicating it was acceptable to use just 'sometimes'. Participants named only clarification and explanation of difficult vocabulary and/or grammar items as an acceptable use of the L1 by teachers, as evidenced through such comments as:

P7: It can be used to explain or elaborate on points if the students don't understand.

P18: Only to explain things that cannot be made clear in the L2.

63% of the participants made reference to a belief that L2 learning is best undertaken in the target language:

P20: You learn a lot more if you're forced to use/hear only the L2.

P5: I believe a high degree of immersion is useful - cold water doesn't seem so cold after a while.

Proficiency level and L1 use

A general trend that was found in the participants' opinions regarding L1 use across the three main proficiency levels (in this case categorised as beginner, intermediate, and advanced), with more L1 use accepted at the beginner levels, and less as the learners become more advanced.

Beginner level. 77% of the participants believed the L1 could be used 'often' or 'sometimes' at the beginner level, compared to just 17% and 6% who claimed it should be used 'seldom' or 'never' respectively. The participants evidenced these claims with comments such as:

P23: You need L1 to explain and introduce language.

P15: When you first learn a language, you need the safety net of your L1 to retreat back to when you're not confident in the little ability you have in you L2.

Intermediate level. A change was seen in the participants' views of L1 use at the intermediate level, with 54% claiming it could be used 'sometimes' in the L2 classroom, 43% claiming its use should only be 'seldom', and just one participant claiming it should 'never' be used. Comments suggested the need for less L1 use in L2 learning, which should be undertaken in the TL as much as possible, using the L1 only when vitally necessary. For example:

P2: Heavily encourage L2 use, only using the L1 when absolutely necessary.

P14: Need a withdrawal of L1 scaffolding.

Advanced level. 54% of the participants commented that the use of the L1 should be ‘seldom’ at the advanced level, with the remaining 46% claiming it should not be used at all because it *prevents constructive use of the L2* (P18). The participants’ comments suggested a lack of understanding regarding how the L1 can be used effectively to indirectly aid and facilitate L2 learning. Some reflected a limited knowledge base, flatly claiming that:

P3: *At this level, the L1 would not provide benefit.*

P13: *They (learners) need to use L2 all the time.*

Other comments point to language acquisition as a linear or unidirectional process, suggesting that once learners reach an advanced stage the L1 loses its beneficial role to support and facilitate L2 learning:

P1: *At this point, learners should be able to work through problems using L2 knowledge.*

P19: *Students should be at a level where they can take part in the class in the L2.*

L1 use in each of the four language skills

Despite the participants’ initial acceptance of L1 use, particularly at the beginner level, when asked to what extent they believe the L1 should be used to aid the development of each of the four language skills, very few participants were accepting of its excessive use. Table 1 displays the amount of L1 use participants considered acceptable in the development of each of the four language skills. It is interesting to note that none of the four skills were viewed as deserving L1 use more than 50% of the time in class.

TABLE 1: *Participants’ views regarding how often the L1 should be used in each language domain*

	Language skill			
	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Always (76-100%)	—	—	—	—
Often (51-75%)	—	—	—	—
Sometimes (26-50%)	3.00%	3.00%	46.00%	50.00%
Seldom (1-25%)	40.00%	30.00%	40.00%	35.00%
Never (0%)	57.00%	67.00%	14.00%	15.00%

Speaking. 57% of the participants claimed that the L1 should never be used when learning to speak in the L2, as evidenced in comments such as:

P24: *Attempting to solely speak in the L2 will enable the speakers to learn to speak naturally and take risks.*

P27: *Full L2 immersion is better for speaking as learners have to use their L2.*

A further 40% of the participants claimed that the L1 could be used 'seldom' in speaking, with one participant claiming it could be used 'sometimes' for filling gaps in learners' knowledge, because the ability *to discuss, ask questions, or gain further information in L1 may mean the difference between understanding or not* (P7).

Listening. Similar results were seen for the domain of listening, which 67% of the participants claimed should 'not at all' be undertaken in the L1 because *the L1 can slow down processing* (P14). This was further seen in comments such as:

P11: *It's best to listen in the L2 as much as possible.*

P29: *A listening exercise should be done in the L2.*

Reading. The participants were more accepting of L1 use in the domains of reading and writing. 46% stated that the L1 could be used 'sometimes' to aid L2 reading, particularly in the translation of difficult vocabulary. The remaining 54%, however, held negative views of L1 use, similar to those for speaking and listening:

P2: *Students will not need L1 to read L2.*

P21: *Should be trying to read L2, can guess meanings of unknown words.*

Writing. The participants' views regarding L1 use in L2 writing were similar once again, with half suggesting a possible use 'sometimes', 34% claiming it should be used 'seldom', and just 6% claiming it should 'not at all' be used. Those who advocated for its potential use some of the time identified translation as a strategy for which the L1 could be used:

P10: *I think use of L1-L2 dictionaries can be beneficial in writing.*

P28: *When at a loss for words, they can look it up in L1.*

Those participants who were against the use of the L1 in L2 writing predominantly claimed that *learners should practice in the L2* (P19); with one particularly narrow-minded comment stating that *writing should only be the product of thought in the L2* (P25).

General perspectives on L1 use in L2 learning

When asked whether or not they agreed with L1-exclusion in the L2 classroom, the participants were split in an relatively equal ratio of 11:9:10 in terms of those who agreed, disagreed, and had mixed opinions respectively. The majority of the participants (11/30) were in favour of an L1-exclusion classroom, advocating for exclusive use of the TL. Their comments reflected views of the Direct Method and CLT ideologies emphasising the importance of an immersion environment. For example:

P26: *In an L2 learning environment, the focus should be on the L2, meaning extended use and practise in whatever form.*

P21: *I think as much L2 should be used as possible, as that is what is being learnt.*

Other comments highlighted some of the potentially negative effects of L1 use in the classroom:

P8: *I don't think it [L1 use] is a practical way to learn, at least in most classrooms. Most L2 learners barely have enough L2 exposure as it is.*

P12: *Students learn through L2 use. Using the L1 makes them lazy and they will become too reliant on the L1, which demotes L2 use and therefore L2 learning.*

Only 9/30 participants disagreed with an L1-exclusion classroom, commenting on the role of the L1 in easing the learning process:

P30: *I believe complete exclusion is negative as it creates a 'hostile environment', or at least one where the learner may not be comfortable.*

P24: *Especially for lower level learners, they need L1 as a scaffolding to learn the L2.*

The remaining 10 participants saw both pros and cons to L1 use in the L2 classroom. However, their comments favoured minimal use of the L1, with the translation and/or explanation of difficult vocabulary and grammar identified as the only acceptable use of the L1:

P22: *Immersion does play a major role, but I believe allowing L1 use (particularly for clarification, to deepen understanding) is positive.*

P11: *I think there are clear merits to avoiding L1 in language learning, because the learning experience is more authentic. On the other hand, being able to use L1 can be useful to help with some understanding, like translating vocabulary.*

The final question in the survey asked participants whether they felt as though they knew enough about the use of the L1 in L2 learning. Only two participants claimed to have 'some idea' of the potential role of the L1 in L2 learning, with 19/30 claiming they 'wanted to know'

more, and a further nine admitting to having 'no idea'. In other words, 93% of the participants confessed to needing to know more about L1 use in the L2 classroom, as reflected in the following comments:

P3: *Role of L1 still unclear.*

P14: *I would like to know more to be able to make up my mind about where I would sit on this continuum.*

20% of the participants attributed this to a lack of teaching experience, as expressed in comments such as:

P1: *Until I have practical experience in 'the real world' it is hard to make an informed opinion.*

P11: *I don't have enough experience to be sure about my views on the use of the L1.*

Two participants specifically suggested that their opinions had been influenced by their own past experiences as language learners:

P16: *Learning a second language myself has helped me to understand more about the use of the L1 in the L2 learning environment.*

P25: *In my learning experience, the L1 was used more than I consider necessary and because of this I believe there can certainly be too much L1 which can be negative.*

Comments such as, *because I don't know enough, I don't think I'll use the L1 at all as a teacher, and would just stick to the L2* (P29), suggest that participants' lack of awareness regarding how the L1 can be used in the L2 classroom has had an adverse affect on their teaching beliefs as pre-service teacher trainees. This may, in turn, have detrimental effects on their future teaching practices if they are otherwise uneducated on the role of the L1 as valuable teaching tool.

Discussion

It has been suggested that the principal users of the L1 in the L2 classroom are generally teachers and not the students (Chaudron, 1988). However, in the present study, many of the participants expressed more acceptance of students' use of the L1 than by the teacher. What little acceptance participants did have for teachers' use of the L1 was limited, focussing predominately on making comparisons between the L1 and L2, which Cummins (2007) claims to promote learning efficiencies when teachers 'explicitly draw students' attention to similarities and differences between their languages' (p. 233). They also focussed on

ideational functions (Lin, 2015), namely, the explanation and/or translation of difficult vocabulary and grammar points. Some participants went as far as to claim clarification to be the only role of the L1 in L2 learning, suggesting a very limited knowledge base of L1 use in the L2 classroom overall.

Many of the participants in the present study stressed the importance of an L2 immersion environment as opposed to one adopting a bilingual approach to L2 learning in which strategic use of the L1 is employed. Their justification centered on 2 main points: 1.) use of the L1 creates a lack of L2 exposure, and 2.) L1 use will make learners lazy and over-reliant on their L1. However, Gaebler's (2014) study found that L2 students recognise the importance of speaking and interacting in the TL, and thus showed no signs of laziness nor a lack effort when utilising their L1 in the L2 classroom. It should also be noted that, use of the L1 must be strategic, purposeful, and appropriate (Jadallah & Hasan, 2011). It is the role of the teacher to decide when and how to best utilise the L1 in the classroom, and act as a mediator to control students' L1 use if necessary, so as to avoid negative consequences of over-use and over-reliance.

As expected, many of those participants who were against the use of the L1, and in favour of exclusive use of the TL, had no experience learning a second language themselves; perhaps basing their opinions on the belief that English can only be learnt by speaking English. On the other hand, all of those participants who were even somewhat accepting of L1 use had had some form of L2 learning and/or teaching experience involving the L1 to both good and bad appraisal. This supports Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan's (2001) claim that trainee language teachers' beliefs and about language teaching originate from their own L2 learning experiences. However, as Cochran-Smith and Fries (2005) point out, the beliefs about L2 teaching that participants hold based on their own learning experiences can act as a barrier to impede their teacher training and therefore students' learning. It is therefore important that pre-service L2 teachers are made aware of these beliefs whilst they are in training, and keep an open mind regarding teaching practices beyond what they are familiar with from their own past experiences.

Although the participants in the present study were generally in agreement that teachers and students alike should use more L1 at the beginner levels, and less as the learners become more advanced, their comments suggested that when learners reach a certain stage in their L2 learning process (advanced), the L1 loses its beneficial role to support and facilitate their learning. However, Cummins (2007) states that '[s]tudents' L1 is not the enemy in promoting

high levels of L2 proficiency' (p. 238). Advanced learners can utilise their L1 in a number of ways to facilitate and maximise L2 learning. Gaebler's (2014) study found that advanced learners utilise translanguaging to facilitate and sustain smooth communication, and to strengthen their messages, either to compensate for a lack of vocabulary or grammar, or to increase interlocutor accessibility. The L1 may also be used in advanced classes for higher-level problem solving (Centeno-Cortés & Jiménez Jiménez, 2004), and to construct a solid foundation for grammar and vocabulary knowledge (Al Hariri, 2015). Although advanced students may not require the L1 to the extent of lower levels, they are still learners of the language and thus can, and do, utilise the L1 as a natural, psycholinguistic tool to aid and facilitate their own L2 learning.

It is also interesting to examine the participants' views of L1 use in developing each of the four language skills. Participants were generally less accepting of L1 use in L2 speaking and listening as they were for reading and writing, which may indicate their conceptions regarding the value of print based vs oral communication. Translation was recognised by many as the only acceptable use of the L1 in all four domains. This view may also have been influenced by participants' own experiences as L2 learners, as translation in to the L1 is considered a 'preferred learning strategy' by most students (Manara, 2007, p. 146). In the cases of speaking and listening, the participants focussed on the idea that practising to communicate in the L2 must be done in English and subsequently disregarded any further roles of the L1. However, what many failed to recognise is the indirect, underlying benefits of L1 use in the development of speaking and listening, such as increasing learner's confidence (Phakiti, 2006), easing stress and anxiety levels (Levine, 2003), offering a sense of security (Schweers, 1999), and lowering affective filters (Meyer, 2008). By using the L1 to encourage and support learners behind the scenes, building confidence and lowering affective filters, we may find that learners become more relaxed, and transfer pragmatic aspects of L2 use to develop a 'willingness to take risks in communication through L2' (Cummins, 2007, p. 233).

Given the limited number of participants, the present study provides only a small, localised perspective of trainee ESL teachers' opinions on L1 use in the L2 classroom. The relatively small size of the questionnaire employed in this study must also be identified as a limitation. In spite of this, the present study has attempted to outline the views of pre-service ESL teachers on L1 use in the L2 classroom, from which further research may be based to fully understand how pre-service teachers perceive L1 use, and the influential role of experience on these beliefs. Future studies would investigate how the beliefs of pre-service L2 teachers regarding the L1 change after a year or more of actual teaching experience. A longitudinal

study comparing their pre-service beliefs to those they hold after gaining experience in the field would help to determine the extent to which experience in language teaching affects their views on L1 use in the classroom, and whether or not their pre-held beliefs on L1 use are subject to change and adaptation should it prove necessary.

Conclusion

Whilst this paper is not an argument for the abandonment of modern pedagogies in which little use of the L1 is encouraged, it is, however, an advocacy for awareness of the facilitating benefits of L1 use in L2 learning in a selective, purposeful and appropriate manner. The pre-service teacher participants in the present study were of mixed opinions on the matter. Some may have been influenced by traditionally negative views of L1 use in L2 learning, with others in favour and support of some L1 in the L2 classroom. Their acceptance of the L1 was generally limited to the functions of translation and explanation, and suggested a relative lack of knowledge and understanding of its many indirect facilitating roles. This gap in their knowledge regarding how to utilise such a valuable tool has the potential to cause negative effects on their future teaching practices, and subsequently on their students' L2 learning. It is therefore suggested that more education into the use of the L1 is needed in ESL teacher training courses, with a specific focus on the indirect, underlying beneficial and facilitating roles of the L1 for both the teacher and students in the classroom.

It seems that, the real question we need to be asking ourselves is not *should the L1 be used in L2 learning?*, nor is it *how/when should the L1 be used?*. Rather, the real question we need to address is, *are ESL teachers sufficiently educated and aware of the L1's potential role in L2 learning?*; because, if they are, they have the potential to answer the first two questions by themselves. It may be the case that a framework for effective L1 use is required to be taught at pre-service teacher training programmes. However, the development of such a framework is no easy task. Macaro (2001) first raised the need for a framework of L1 use that "identifies when reference to the L1 can be a valuable tool and when it is simply used as an easy option" (p. 545). Some scholars (e.g. Levine, 2003) have since attempted to do so, but this has proven to be a complex task (Inbar-Lourie, 2010), and currently no such framework exists. As such, ESL teacher-training courses must focus on first identifying, and then work to change, the pre-held beliefs that trainee teachers bring from past experiences regarding the use of the L1. Only by raising their awareness of their own pre-held beliefs, and increasing their knowledge of the L1's facilitating role in the L2 classroom, will newly-emerging ESL teachers enter the L2 classroom with the knowledge and confidence required to make informed decisions about when, how, and by whom, the L1 can be effectively used to maximise L2 learning.



Biodata

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ⁱ Dominant TESOL pedagogies such as CLT were developed in inner-circle English speaking countries where English was used as the language of instruction. Subsequently, teachers from a multitude of foreign language backgrounds who went to learn these teaching practices in countries such as the UK and US developed a preconception based on their own training that English must be taught solely in English (Mahboob & Lin, 2016).

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Appendix 1: Participant information

Participant number	Age group	Gender	L1	L2 proficiency (& location learnt)	Teaching experience and duration
1	35+	M	English	---	---
2	<20	M	English	---	---
3	20-25	M	English, Korean	Int. Japanese (NZ)	EFL tutor, 2mths, Korea
4	20-25	M	English	Beg. German (NZ)	---
5	20-25	M	English	Int. German (NZ)	---
6	20-25	M	English	Beg. Japanese; Int. Ancient Greek (NZ)	---
7	20-25	M	English	Beg. Japanese (NZ)	---
8	26-35	M	Chinese	Adv. English (China)	TOEFL teacher, 1yr, China
9	20-25	F	English	Int. Thai	EFL assistant teacher, 6mths, Thailand
10	20-25	F	English	Adv. French (NZ; France)	---
11	20-25	F	English	Adv. French (NZ; Canada)	---
12	20-25	F	English	---	---
13	26-35	F	Chinese	Adv. English (China)	---
14	35+	F	English	Adv. Afrikaans (S/A); Beg. Maori (NZ)	---
15	<20	F	English	Beg. Japanese (NZ)	---
16	<20	F	English	Beg. Spanish (NZ)	---
17	<20	F	English	Int. Spanish (AUS)	---
18	20-25	F	English	Beg. Spanish (USA)	---
19	20-25	F	English	Int. German (NZ)	---
20	20-25	F	English	Int. Maori (NZ)	---
21	20-25	F	English	Beg. French (NZ)	---
22	20-25	F	Korean	Adv. English; Beg. Japanese (NZ)	EFL tutor, 1yr, Korea



23	20-25	F	English	Beg. Italian (England)	---
24	20-25	F	English	Beg. Japanese (NZ)	---
25	26-35	F	Vietnam ese	Adv. English (Vietnam)	EYL teacher, 2yrs, Vietnam
26	20-25	F	English	---	---
27	20-25	F	English	Int. French (NZ)	---
28	20-25	M	English	Beg. Japanese (NZ)	---
29	20-25	M	English	---	---
30	20-25	M	English	Beg. Spanish (NZ)	---



Appendix 2: Participant questionnaire

Age: below 20 () 20-25 () 26-35 () 35+ ()
Gender: male () female ()

When did you take the previous unit? _____

Native language: _____

Second language(s), proficiency, and where you learnt the language: _____

Country/countries of previous education: _____

Do you have any ESL/EFL teaching experience? If so, please provide details: _____

1.) How often do you think students should use their L1 is in learning ESL/EFL? Please explain.

All the time frequently sometimes seldom not at all

2.) How often do you think teachers should use the students' L1 (assuming they can) for teaching purposes in the L2 classroom? Please explain.

All the time frequently sometimes seldom not at all

3.) To what extent do you think learners should be allowed to use their L1 in the L2 classroom? (Circle your preference for the each item).

A.) Beginner:

Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never



B.) Intermediate:

Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

C.) Advanced:

Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

4.) How much do you think learner’s L2 proficiency can benefit from the use of the L1? Please choose from each item below and explain your choice.

Speaking: Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

Listening: Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

Reading: Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

Writing: Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

5.) How much do you think learners can benefit from using their L1 at each level? Please choose from each item below and explain your choice.

Beginner : Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

Intermediate: Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never



Advanced: Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never

5.) Do you agree that learners' L1 should be excluded from the language classroom. Please explain.

6.) As an ESL teacher-in-training, do you think you know enough about the role of the L1 (be it positive or negative) in the L2 classroom? Please explain.

Definitely kind of would like to know more not really definitely not
