



# L1 Use as a Component of Classroom Management in L2 Teaching: A Qualitative Study on Iranian EFL Teachers' Cognition

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore Iranian teachers' cognition of L1 use in L2 teaching as a component of classroom management, in EFL classes at private language schools in Iran. The study comprised 12 in-service teachers, and the sample size was decided based upon data saturation. The instrument employed in this research was a semi-structured interview, designed to elicit the participating teachers' cognition. The interviews were audio-recorded and were subsequently transcribed. Thematic analysis of the data demonstrated that the teachers believed the extent and frequency of L1 use should be balanced based on the objectives of L2 lessons, so that classes could be smoothly managed and learners could be sufficiently exposed to L2. Besides, the participants held that for effective classroom management, teachers should use L1 judiciously and selectively. In addition, they accentuated the significance of attention to learners' English language proficiency level, psychological factors, and educational needs in this respect. Moreover, they were aware of the potential role of L1 use with regard to classroom management strategies, such as establishing rapport, maintaining discipline, and managing time. Overall, the participants were cognizant of using L1 in L2 teaching as a classroom management component. This inquiry provides implications for supervisors of language schools, language teachers, and language teacher educators.

**KEYWORDS:** classroom management, language schools, teacher cognition, first language, teacher education

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## 1. Introduction

First language (L1), also called mother tongue or home language, refers to the language that individuals have acquired as children at home (Harmer, 2012). It can be considered a resource in foreign language classes since it has the potential to be integrated into the lesson plan, and it can be used intentionally and reasonably in order to maximize L2 learning (Shin et al., 2020). Besides, using L1 in L2 classes can have various functions; e.g., teaching vocabulary (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2020; Navidinia et al., 2018), teaching grammar (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2020; Navidinia et al., 2020), checking learners' comprehension (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2020), encouraging learners (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2020), and answering learners' questions (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2020). These functions can aid in creating a more effective L2 learning experience for EFL learners.

From the perspective of managing a classroom, utilizing L1 is considered a component of classroom management in L2 instruction (Brown & Lee, 2015; Harmer, 2007; 2012), specifically when teacher's L1 is the same as her/his learners (Harmer, 2007). This can occur in foreign language contexts, such as the EFL context of Iran. First language use can also help in building

rapport with learners (Harmer, 2012; Mohamadi et al., 2023), and rapport development can be in service of efficient classroom management (Brown & Lee, 2015; Harmer, 2012). However, there has been a debate in language schools in the EFL setting of Iran over the utilization of L1 (Yaqubi & Pouromid, 2013). The question of whether or not to permit the utilization of L1 in language classes is discussed in Teacher Training Courses, and there are teacher trainers who discourage its use.

In this context, there are language schools that prohibit L1 use by teachers in their classes, while other language schools give more freedom to teachers in this respect (Yaqubi & Pouromid, 2013). Nonetheless, investigating the degree of success in language teaching/learning at language schools with different approaches towards L1 use was not the focus of this study. Rather, the present study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' cognition of L1 use as a component of classroom management in private language schools. Teachers' cognition of L1 use as a component of classroom management in L2 teaching is of vital importance, because their practice in this regard can be shaped by their cognition (Borg, 2006). However, very few studies focused on L1 use from teachers' perspective, particularly in Iran (Miri et al., 2017; Mohamadi et al., 2023; Rabani et al., 2014). Therefore, the aim of the present study was to find out about and shed light on the reality of L1 use for managing classes in this context from the teachers' perspective, by addressing the following research question:

What are EFL teachers' cognitions of L1 use as a component of classroom management in L2 teaching, in private language schools in Iran?

## 2. Literature Review

Research on teacher cognition seeks to explore and describe teachers' beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and knowledge (Borg, 2019). Teacher cognition is a key concept in teacher education (Borg, 2006). Borg (2010) offers six main themes in teacher education and recognizes teacher cognition as the first theme. In the field of language teacher education, teachers are recognized as 'active participants' of a community who are considered as both dynamic learners as well as dynamic agents of teaching, constantly developing their cognitions in their teaching contexts (Li, 2020). In fact, language teacher education considers teachers as active decision-makers whose professional practice is affected by their cognition (Borg, 2011; Soodmand Afshar et al., 2025) and affects the language learning that occurs in their classrooms (Borg, 2019). Language teachers' cognitions can influence what they do in their classrooms and what they do, in turn, affects learners' language learning (Borg & Sanchez, 2020). According to Borg (2006), "teachers have cognitions about all aspects of their work" (p. 41), and their cognitions can shape how they learn and how they teach (Borg, 2010). Buchanan and Timmis (2019) hold that teachers' cognitions can impact their classroom management ability directly and effectively. This is a pivotal aspect of their professional practice. Likewise, Rinda and Indrastana (2020) believe that successful teaching requires teachers to have strong classroom management skills, and these skills are influenced by their cognitions.

According to Macías (2018), in foreign language contexts, very few research studies have concentrated on first language use as a component of classroom management. Algazo (2023) explored teachers' cognitions concerning the functions of L1 use in EFL classes. Instruments of this qualitative study were classroom observation and interview. Participants of the study were seven Jordanian teachers whose teaching experience ranged from 6 to 23 years (five females and two males). Setting of the study was a city in the north of Jordan where Arabic was spoken as L1. Through thematic analysis of the data, six functions were identified as functions of L1 use in EFL classes in educational context of Jordan: overcoming teaching challenges (challenges regarding teachers' lack of knowledge about some topics and challenges with respect to checking learners' comprehension of lessons), improving learners' motivation (in teacher-learner interactions and in learner-learner interactions), giving instructions, explaining metalinguistic information (grammar, pronunciation, punctuation, and culture), translating (words, phrases, and proverbs), avoiding L2 vocabulary items that sound taboo in L1 (to decrease potential misunderstandings and to avoid learners skipping such words out of shyness). The participants also believed that these functions facilitated language teaching/learning process.

Rabbidge (2017) studied the factors that influenced instructors' cognition about the utilization of L1 in EFL classes in South Korea. Semi-structured interview was utilized as the instrument of the study. Participants of the study were five South Korean teachers. Based on the results of the study, the researcher expressed that teacher training programs, colleagues, learners, and teacher identity were among the factors that could affect teachers' cognition about L1 utilization in EFL classes. Al-Amir (2017) inspected teachers' cognition of L1 utilization in EFL classes in Saudi Arabia. Participants of the study were thirty-one female teachers whose native language was Arabic. A questionnaire was administered to the participants and the results indicated that most of the participants were in favor of using L1 in their classes. The findings also showed that there was no correlation between the participants' English language proficiency and their cognition of L1 use. Debreli's (2016) qualitative study focused on teachers' cognition of L1 use in EFL classes in Northern Cyprus, by using semi-structured interview as the instrument of the study. Participants of this study were fifty-four Turkish Cypriots who had at least three years of experience in teaching. Analysis of the interview data indicated that although the participants had to follow an English-only policy in their classes, they reported the utilization of L1 in their classes for reasons such as defining new words and interacting in the classroom.

Miri et al. (2017) concentrated on teachers' cognition about the utilization of L1 in Iran's EFL context. They explored the effects of a teacher education program on the participants' cognitions and practices. The teacher education program had a critical approach, and the settings of the study were language schools in Iran. Participants of the study, who were ten teachers, took part in semi-structured interview sessions and stimulated recall sessions which were held before and after the teacher education program. In addition, two sessions of each participant's classes were recorded. The data underwent qualitative analysis. Findings of the study showed that before the teacher education program, the participants had negative attitudes toward the use

of L1 in their classes and rarely used it in their classes. Nevertheless, the participants' cognitions were reshaped, they expressed more positive attitudes towards the utilization of L1 in their classes, and they also displayed a tendency to utilize L1 in their classes, after taking part in the teacher education program. Rabani et al.'s (2014) quantitative study investigated the cognitions of thirty EFL teachers. The participating teachers were administered a questionnaire. The concentration of the questionnaire was on teachers' cognitions about the utilization of L1 for teaching reading comprehension in EFL classes in Iran. Findings indicated that the participants believed in the usefulness of using L1 while teaching reading comprehension in their classes. In addition, they believed that using L1 enhances the learners' engagement and increases their comprehension of the reading passages. By reviewing previous studies, it was indicated that teachers' cognitions of L1 use as a component of classroom management in L2 teaching have received scant attention in the EFL context of Iran.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

Borg (2019) holds that, in general, a qualitative research design is the most appropriate choice for exploring teachers' cognition. It is a logical choice since according to Dörnyei (2007) and Friedman (2012), qualitative research is concerned with participants' opinions, views, and thoughts. Hence, qualitative research design was chosen to conduct the present study. It was selected on account of the purposes which were sought to be achieved by this research, because according to Dörnyei (2007), "qualitative research is concerned with subjective opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals, and thus the explicit goal of the research is to explore the participants' views of the situation being studied" (p. 38). According to Mackey and Gass (2016), the most commonly used qualitative data collection methods include (p. 219): ethnographies, case studies, interviews, observational techniques, and diaries/journals. Among these qualitative data collection methods, interviews were utilized in the present study.

#### 3.2. Participants

The present study involved twelve in-service teachers, all of whom were engaged in instructing adult learners of EFL in face-to-face classes at private language schools in Iran. The participating group comprised five females and seven males. Teaching experience among the participants ranged from five to ten years ( $M = 6.7$  years), and their ages ranged from 24 to 39 years ( $M = 28.9$  years). All the participants had completed a Teacher Training Course prior to the commencement of their teaching careers. The size of the sample was determined based upon the principle of data saturation, whereby additional data collection ceased when no new themes emerged. Language schools were selected using convenience sampling, while the participants were chosen through purposeful sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from them. Besides, for the purposes of anonymity and identification, each participant was assigned a number (e.g., T1, T2, T3, T4, etc.). Data collection involved the administration of a demographic questionnaire followed by individual interviews. Notably, the first language of the participants was congruent with that of their learners.

#### 3.3. Instrument

This study utilized a semi-structured one-on-one face-to-face interview as its instrument to gather data from the participants about their cognition of L1 use in L2 classrooms as a component of classroom management. A total of twelve interview sessions were held, with each participant being interviewed for approximately an hour. These individual interview sessions were held in English. A flexible guide, including interview questions, was developed for the purpose of this study, based on the literature pertaining to the incorporation of L1 use in L2 instruction. The interview guide questions were inspected by a professional teacher trainer with a Ph.D. in applied linguistics and more than 20 years of experience in training EFL instructors at the university level. To refine the interview guide's clarity and applicability, it was piloted with three EFL teachers in order to find ambiguities and potential issues. This was followed by revisions informed by the piloting. While the guide supplied a framework for the interviews, the participants were actively prompted and urged to expand upon their answers and provide thorough explanations. This approach facilitated the collection of rich, in-depth qualitative data. The interview guide included the following main questions:

- In your opinion, should EFL teachers use L1 in their classes? Why/why not?
- In your opinion, what are the main reasons for using L1 by EFL teachers in their classes?
- In what specific situations or activities do you think using L1 is helpful in EFL classes?
- In your opinion, should EFL teachers let learners use L1 in their classes? Why/why not?
- What potential drawbacks or challenges do you see regarding L1 use in EFL classes?
- In your opinion, how can using or not using L1 relate to EFL classroom management?

#### 3.4. Procedure

At the beginning of the study, the participating teachers were informed about the objective and procedure of the research, and their consent was obtained. After completing the demographic questionnaire, the participants were interviewed individually. The interviews were recorded in audio format and were subsequently transcribed.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

The process of thematically analyzing the data involved an iterative inductive data-driven process. It included initial reading and reflection, followed by rereading and reconsideration of the data. This was succeeded by coding, re-coding, and the identification of emergent themes, ultimately culminating in the interpretation of these themes (Creswell, 2014). Dörnyei (2007) similarly conceptualizes the process of thematic analysis as a sequence that encompasses transcription, coding, re-coding, thematic exploration, and interpretation. Throughout this process, meticulous inspection of the data was conducted to identify and interpret patterns and themes.

## 4. Results

Seven main themes, including various sub-themes, were identified through data analysis. These themes are substantiated and elucidated through representative excerpts derived from the interviews. The selected excerpts, drawn from the entirety of the twelve individual interviews, constitute the most illustrative examples for each theme. These excerpts were chosen from among the instances that exemplified each sub-theme and theme.

### 4.1. Theme 1: To Use L1 or Not to Use L1

In the context of EFL teaching in Iran, participants of the study believed that L1 use should be incorporated into English language classes as long as it is used judiciously to accomplish certain purposes, when there is a logical reason for using it. They added that L1 should be used when it could facilitate learners' understanding and learning. Moreover, they held that there has been a shift in the attitude towards L1 utilization in teaching EFL. They highlighted the importance of considering the role of L1 utilization in L2 instruction and the need for teachers to make informed decisions about when and how to incorporate L1 use into their instructional practices.

*T9: I think L1 can be used and should be used. I can't find any reasons to forbid it in classes. If we use it reasonably for achieving specific goals, then of course it should be used at times.*

*T2: Some years ago, teachers weren't allowed to use L1 at all, you know, but nowadays I guess they're allowing teachers to use L1, to help students understand better. We should use it when it's needed, I mean when there's a logic behind using it.*

*T1: At first, I teach students in English and then if I see that they don't understand, I use L1 to teach them.*

However, they added that teachers should avoid translating all sentences and texts that exist in ELT course-books being taught, since the focus of language classes in language schools should be on fluent language use. Further, they held that translation, which should be considered an independent skill, might hinder teaching/learning language use.

*T5: Well, I agree that L1 use can be a part of our classes, but if we look at using it as translating every passage or every sentence for students, I'm totally against it, because translation is a special skill that's learned at university. But here in language school, we're supposed to teach them English language and its use. I think they won't be able to fluently use English language if we translate all the sentences and texts for them.*

#### 4.1.1. Sub-Theme 1-1: Amount of L1 Which Is Used Should Be Controlled

The participants foregrounded the significance of using target language in EFL classes as much as possible in order to prevent over-reliance on L1. They believed that the utilization of L1 in L2 instruction should be done cautiously and selectively.

*T5: If my own use of L1 does not have limitations, if I speak L1 when it's not necessary, my students will also give themselves a sort of allowance to use L1 freely and easily. I experienced such a problem as a teacher. The result was terrible.*

Further, they were concerned that excessive use of L1 could reduce learners' exposure to English language, and would create a dependency on L1 which could make it difficult for learners to use L2 exclusively, as learners might become overly reliant on L1 and might not put in sufficient effort to use L2, if L1 was used too frequently.

*T7: I think when teacher uses L1 a lot and too much, it makes STUDENTS lazy. I mean they may get this impression that if you don't know something in English, there is another option that's a piece of cake. You can say it in L1 and it's OK. They say when teacher uses it, so I can use it too.*

#### 4.1.2. Sub-Theme 1-2: L1 Use Should Be Considered the Last Resort

The participants repeatedly stated that they essentially tried to avoid using L1, unless they had to use it due to circumstances or



flow of lessons. They held that using L1 was the last resort, and could be seen as a strategy to facilitate comprehension in order to ensure that learners understood the material. Moreover, they mentioned that teachers should strike a balance between using L1 as a tool for comprehension and promoting the use of target language. They added that EFL teachers should create an environment in which L2 is the primary language of instruction and communication. They believed that teachers should carefully consider when and how to use L1 in the classroom in order to maximize its benefits and minimize its drawbacks.

**T3:** *I teach first in English. I try my best to help students understand without using L1. But if I see that they don't get it, then I MUST use L1 as my final solution. If they don't get it, they become confused, and they may get everything incorrectly till the end of that lesson. I think ONLY at this point it should be used, because it's necessary to help them understand.*

#### 4.1.3.Sub-Theme 1-3: L1 Use May Cause Misunderstandings

The participants expressed concerns about the misunderstandings that L1 use might cause in their classes. They posited that most of their learners expected to be taught mainly in the target language. The participants were also worried that using L1 may negatively impact learners' perceptions of their teacher's knowledge and ability to teach the target language. Besides, they were mindful of the potential problems that L1 use might cause in their classes, e.g., learners' complaint.

**T2:** *You know, students PAY for their classes in language schools. Imagine when they come to class, they see their teacher speaks L1 more than what they've expected. They may think their teacher can't speak English very well, and so they lose their trust in their teacher's knowledge. They may complain to supervisor. It unfortunately happened to one of my workmates.*

#### 4.1.4.Sub-Theme 1-4: Learners Should Also Have Permission to Use L1 Judiciously

The participants believed that sometimes learners should be given permission to use L1, and their English language proficiency level should be considered a determining factor in this respect. They held that by allowing L1 use in lower proficiency level classes, teachers could help reduce learners' anxiety and promote learners' understanding of L2, while by limiting L1 use in higher proficiency level classes, teachers could promote learners' use of L2 and help learners progress in their language learning. Since attention to learners' English language proficiency level is crucial regarding L1 utilization in L2 teaching, it is particularized as a separate theme (Theme 2).

**T12:** *I let students use L1, sometimes, like at the very beginning of class. You know, I may let them use it, because I want them to feel more comfortable at some specific times like that. Teacher must monitor and control, because students should know that they are not allowed to use it whenever they like. Of course in higher levels, I don't allow my students as much as I allow them in lower levels. In higher levels, if students use L1, um, most of the times I may stop them. But in lower levels, like starter and elementary, sometimes we should allow them to use it, because there are still a lot of things they don't know how to say in English. When I was a student, we had a teacher in elementary class who was too sensitive about using L1 by students. He stopped us by harshly shouting ONLY English, and I felt so bad.*

The participants added that teachers should have strategies to restrict their learners' use of L1; for instance, by constraining the number of times they are permitted to use L1, or obliging them to ask for teacher's permission each time they needed to use it. They emphasized that these restrictions intended to encourage EFL learners to use L2 more frequently.

**T8:** *I believe it's OK to let students use L1 once or twice each session, but not all the time, because, well, it may turn into a habit for them. I believe their teacher should tell this to them like a RULE, their teacher should tell them OK, once or twice in each session, if you really don't have any idea about what to say or what to do. Teacher should set this with them from the first session of the class.*

**T4:** *I always tell my students at the beginning of each term that if you have a question that you can't ask in English, and you need to ask it in L1, first you must ask for my permission for asking it using L1. I actually teach them to raise hand and ask.*

### 4.2. Theme 2: Attention to Learners' English Language Proficiency Level

The participants emphasized the importance of taking into account English language proficiency level of learners when deciding about the utilization of L1 in EFL classes. They maintained that the amount of L1 use should be adjusted according to the EFL learners' proficiency level, as beginners might need more L1 support to understand the target language, while intermediate and advanced learners might benefit more from exposure to the target language.

**T3:** *I believe the amount of L1 use in class depends on students' level. For starters, we must use L1 more often. But for intermediate students, naturally it's not used as much.*

#### 4.2.1.Sub-Theme 2-1: Low-Proficiency Learners

Taking into consideration the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), they held that the utilization

of L1 in lower-level EFL classes such as A1 and A2 could be beneficial for learners' understanding and learning. Besides, they believed that using L1 could prevent learners' confusion, which could be considered a common problem in lower-level classes where learners would have limited proficiency in the target language.

*T6: You know, in the lower-level classes, like A1 and A2 and maybe B1, sometimes L1 should be used. It helps them to understand better and learn better. Actually, in these levels, using L1 can prevent students' confusion.*

#### 4.2.2.Sub-Theme 2-2: High-Proficiency Learners

By referring to CEFR, they suggested that at B2 level (and above), L1 use should be minimized as higher-level EFL learners would have a better understanding of English language. They added that as learners progress in their language learning to higher levels of proficiency such as upper-intermediate and advanced, they should rely less on their L1 and more on the L2.

*T11: When students go to B2, in my opinion, L1 should be used rarely. Because at higher level classes, students can understand English better and more.*

### 4.3. Theme 3: Attention to Learners' Psychological Factors

The participants were aware of the importance of psychological factors concerning L1 use in L2 teaching.

#### 4.3.1.Sub-Theme 3-1: Judicious L1 Use May Decrease Learners' Classroom Anxiety

They asserted that learners at low English language proficiency levels, might need to use L1 when they had a question or request that they could not express in English. Moreover, they averred that preventing learners from using L1 in such cases might cause them to feel stressed and anxious. They believed that judicious L1 use could reduce learners' classroom anxiety, and this could in turn lead to more effective language learning.

*T2: Students, especially at lower levels, when they have a question or a request, they really need to use L1. I mean when they don't know how to say it in English, and it's an emergency for them, for example. Um, or when they ask me a question, and they don't understand my answer. So, the only thing is using L1. If I don't let them use it at emergencies, or if they don't get what I say, they may feel stressed and anxious, although they're adults. So, it should be used when it's really needed, to help them be more relaxed.*

#### 4.3.2.Sub-Theme 3-2: Excessive L1 Use May Decrease Learners' Motivation

The participants believed that using L1 by EFL teachers, without certain considerations, such as the amount of L1 which is used and the occasions in which it is used, may decrease learners' motivation for learning English language. They added that learners might feel as if they were not being challenged sufficiently. Besides, the participants emphasized that although L1 use could help learners understand difficult concepts, excessive L1 use could lead to lack of challenge, lack of interest, and lack of motivation.

*T4: After all, it is an English class and I believe using L1 by teacher, without any limitations, doesn't make it interesting for students, it may demotivate them. A teacher who usually speaks English fluently can give them motivation, because she is actually a role model, it gives them hope that success in learning English is possible, because in the past she used to be a student herself and now she can speak fluently and she can also teach English. Our students care so much about speaking English fluently, so this has an influence on them.*

#### 4.3.3.Sub-Theme 3-3: Excessive L1 Use May Decrease Learners' Autonomy

The participants believed that excessive use of L1 might reduce learners' autonomy and responsibility for their own learning. They held that learners should be given opportunities to think and search in order to become autonomous learners.

*T8: Well, for example, if I immediately give them L1 translation of EVERY word, they don't have the opportunity to think about it or find its meaning themselves. It may lower their autonomy, because it's like spoon-feeding them and making things too easy for them, especially when L1 is used. I think too much use of L1 may stop them from accepting their own responsibility for learning new language. They look at L1 as a help which is always present. I prefer that they don't be dependent on L1.*

### 4.4. Theme 4: Attention to Learners' Educational Needs and Expectations

The participants accentuated the importance of needs analysis apropos of the utilization of L1 in EFL classes. They emphasized that the use of L1 in L2 teaching should be based on learners' needs and preferences. Their approach to L1 use in L2 teaching reflected a learner-centered and needs-based approach to language teaching.

*T2: It very much depends on what students want and need. For example, in one of my elementary classes, students prefer to have the new grammar lessons only in L1. I have two other elementary classes in which students prefer to*

*know everything first in English, and if it's not clear to them, they ask me to say it in L1. You know, I'm their teacher, and students come to class to learn. If I teach something and they don't understand, so why am I teaching?*

They also highlighted the importance of recognizing the differences among learners of each class concerning their needs and expectations. This indicated a critical aspect of learner-centeredness, that is, a focus on the fact that learners should be considered individuals with unique needs, aims, and preferences.

**T9:** *If they need something to be said in L1, then it's my duty as their teacher to do so. Of course I must not go too far in doing that because there are different students with different needs and wants in each class. I must have a BALANCE in each class to meet the expectations of each student to a logical extent.*

#### 4.5. Theme 5: L1 Use for Teaching Language Sub-Skills

The participants believed that among the three language sub-skills (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), L1 can sometimes be utilized for teaching grammar and vocabulary, if the need arises.

##### 4.5.1.Sub-Theme 5-1: L1 Use for Teaching Grammar

The participating teachers believed that L1 use should be considered vital when learners could not understand grammar concepts in English language, regardless of their English language proficiency level.

**T7:** *I sometimes teach in L1; for example, when I'm teaching a grammar part.*

**T10:** *For teaching grammar, L1 can sometimes be used. I think in grammar, if they can't understand it in English, we MUST explain it using L1 after that, whatever the students' level.*

The participants acknowledged that some grammatical structures could be complicated and difficult for learners to comprehend, even at higher English language proficiency levels. They suggested that L1 should be used to explain these complex structures to learners.

**T9:** *I think some grammar points are really complicated, and students can't digest them. And not just for lower levels, even in higher levels, some structures are complicated. So, I think we have to use L1 for teaching them to students. I'm saying this because I've experienced this with my own students.*

The participants also said that they used L1 when teaching grammar to lower-level learners, as they might not have sufficient English knowledge to understand the grammatical structures in English language.

**T6:** *I use L1 mostly when I'm teaching grammar to my A1 or A2 students.*

##### 4.5.2.Sub-Theme 5-2: L1 Use for Teaching Vocabulary

The participants believed that L1 should sometimes be used to teach new vocabulary items, if other means, such as visual aids, would not help learners comprehend the meaning.

**T12:** *When I teach vocabulary, I try to use pictures and picture dictionaries as much as I can for lower levels. For higher levels, I try to explain the meaning of new words in English. But if there's a word that no picture and no explanation can make its meaning clear, of course I say it in L1.*

**T4:** *First, I teach new words in English. For example, I give them some example sentences, I use photos or objects, I act out or mime, I try to elicit the meaning from students, I ask them to guess the meaning from the sentence, sometimes I ask them to check the word themselves in a dictionary. After doing these things, they most probably get the meaning. But in the end, if NONE of these things can work, then I surely tell them the L1 meaning.*

They also emphasized that for teaching vocabulary, translation unit should not be sentence or paragraph, and propounded that it should be word or phrase. In addition, they asserted that teachers should warn their learners that a word-for-word equivalence between languages might not necessarily exist.

**T11:** *When I teach a new word, I explain the meaning of it to my students in English, and if they don't get it, then I may say the L1 translation of that word, but it's just a word, not a sentence, not a paragraph.*

#### 4.6. Theme 6: L1 Use for Teaching Writing

The participants also believed that among the four language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading), L1 can occasionally be used for teaching writing when it is required.

**T9:** *To teach writing, there are special things that must be taught, such as paragraph construction, passage construction, coherence, cohesion, register, and so on. Some of these things are a bit difficult for students to understand. When I was passing TTC, the trainer who was in charge of telling us how to teach language skills said that if students don't understand English explanation of the necessary things for producing a writing, then clarification by using L1 is*

*a good choice for teaching writing. I've followed this recommendation, and it's been useful, even for students at higher levels.*

## 4.7. Theme 7: L1 Use for Management Strategies

The participants were cognizant of the applications that L1 use could directly have in connection with management strategies in an EFL classroom.

### 4.7.1.Sub-Theme 7-1: L1 Use for Managing Rapport

The participating teachers highlighted the importance of having a positive and friendly atmosphere in English language classes. They emphasized the role of rapport-building in creating a conducive learning environment. They also believed that humor and jokes in L1 could change the mood and lead to a more friendly atmosphere by creating and developing rapport.

*T8: I believe language classes should have positive and friendly atmosphere, and students should be in a good mood to learn better. When I see that the atmosphere is not positive, um, or when the atmosphere is tense, I try to change my students' mood by saying a funny sentence in L1, or every now and then I use L1 to tell a joke to make them laugh, to change their mood so that they feel more friendly, you know, to change the atmosphere, so that we can communicate better, not just as teacher and students, I mean as human beings who share the same first language, and this shared language is actually like a bond.*

### 4.7.2.Sub-Theme 7-2: L1 Use for Managing Discipline Problems

The participants held that L1 use could be potent in controlling situations where there was a discipline problem. They suggested that using L1 could be a beneficial tool for solving discipline problems quickly and effectively.

*T3: There are moments in our classes that there's a problem. For example, a student misbehaves and it leads to problems. So, we need to control the situation before it turns into a serious issue, before our supervisor finds out about it. The best thing to do is talking to that trouble-maker in L1. In my experience, saying a few simple L1 sentences can help to solve such problems. Because it's their mother tongue; so, they understand it VERY well, and it's also emotionally more effective on them.*

### 4.7.3.Sub-Theme 7-3: L1 Use for Managing Time

The participants acknowledged that time management could be challenging when trying to explain the meaning of every new vocabulary item in English or when attempting to utilize various techniques for teaching new vocabulary items without desirable results. They suggested that, when appropriate, providing learners with L1 equivalents of new vocabulary items in a selective manner could help them manage the time more effectively.

*T5: Time management may become difficult for me, if I explain the meaning of every new word in English, or if I try every and each technique for teaching words without success. Instead, sometimes giving the L1 meaning of SOME of the new words can save a lot of class time, especially for words that have abstract meaning. I remember one of our trainers in TTC told us that it's suitable to use L1 for teaching them to save time.*

### 4.7.4.Sub-Theme 7-4: L1 Use for Giving Instruction

The participants held that sometimes lower proficiency level learners might not understand instructions given in English; therefore, teachers should use L1 to give instructions if learners could not understand English instruction.

*T12: Starter students may not understand what I say in English when I give them instruction for doing tasks. I mean explanation in English does not work. Then I have to speak L1 for giving instruction, if they don't understand it in English.*

### 4.7.5.Sub-Theme 7-5: L1 Use During Warmers/Icebreakers of Lessons

They believed that when learners might be tired, stressed, or uncomfortable at the beginning of lessons, L1 could be used during warmers/icebreakers in order to break the ice and make learners feel less stressed and more comfortable. It should be noted that due to the role of L1 use for decreasing learners' classroom anxiety throughout EFL lessons, this matter is delineated separately in a more comprehensive manner in sub-theme 3-1.

*T1: Sometimes, at the beginning of a class or a lesson, um, when I see that they're tired or they look uncomfortable or stressful, at first, I speak L1, and after that, I start speaking in English. I learned this from one of my English language teachers in the past. I think students feel more comfortable with me when I break the ice like this. Actually, we can use L1 as an icebreaker.*



#### 4.7.6.Sub-Theme 7-6: L1 Use for Decreasing Teacher Talking Time (TTT)

The participants postulated that when giving extra explanations in English (e.g., when re-explaining the meaning of new vocabulary items), their TTT would increase significantly, while using L1 in such cases could decrease their TTT. They believed that sometimes appropriate L1 use could be considered a means of reducing TTT. It should be mentioned that the concept of TTT is not the same as time management which is a general term.

*T7: When I give too much explanations in English, for example, to teach new words, my TTT increases so much, while saying L1 meaning of that word can help me not talk too much. I think we should use L1 if, for example, eliciting the meaning from students and using images and illustrations and other ways don't work.*

## 5. Discussion

The results of this inquiry indicated that the participating teachers believed in the judicious use of L1 for more effective classroom management in L2 teaching, which was in line with Shin et al. (2020). The participants of the present study asserted that such judicious use of L1 could facilitate learners' understanding and learning, and this could in turn help classroom management. Results of Algazo's (2023) study were also in accordance with this finding. Besides, the participants' belief in L1 potential to be used, if necessary, for teaching language sub-skills of grammar and vocabulary was in agreement with results of Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2020) and Algazo (2023). Similarly, results of Debreli's (2016) study indicated teachers' belief in using L1 for teaching new L2 vocabulary items. Furthermore, the participating teachers in the present research held that selective use of L1 could help teachers create and develop rapport with their learners, as spotlighted by Harmer (2012) and Mohamadi et al. (2023). In addition, the participating teachers maintained that L1 could be used to give instructions, which was similar to results of Algazo's (2023) study. As for L1 use for teaching language skills, while the participants of the present study asserted that L1 could be used to teach writing, findings of Rabani et al.'s (2014) study demonstrated that L1 could be used to teach reading. Although the participants of the present study emphasized that excessive L1 use might decrease EFL learners' motivation, findings of Algazo's (2023) research showed that L1 use could increase learners' motivation.

Moreover, the findings highlighted the potential role of various factors in shaping teachers' cognition regarding L1 utilization as a classroom management component in L2 teaching within this educational setting. These factors included language learning experience, pre-service training, teaching experience, colleagues' teaching experience, and EFL learners' expectations and needs. As demonstrated in the interview excerpts, T12 referred to her past experience as an EFL learner, when talking about learners' judicious use of L1 in EFL classes (Sub-theme 1-4). Another example of the impact of learning experience has been illustrated in an excerpt from the interview with T1, when he talked about his past experience of learning English in an EFL class, in connection with using L1 as an icebreaker (Sub-theme 7-5). He mentioned that he had learned this utilization of L1 from one of his EFL teachers in the past. An example of the impact of pre-service teacher training has been displayed in an interview excerpt with T9. He explained that he had been taught in Teacher Training Course that L1 could be used to teach writing (Theme 6). Likewise, T5 referred to what she had learned in Teacher Training Course about L1 use for time management (Sub-theme 7-3). This finding, concerning the influence of pre-service teacher education, is in line with Borg (2006), Miri et al. (2017), and Rabbidge (2017).

Besides, an example of the impact of teaching experience has been indicated in an excerpt from the interview with T5 when she talked about controlling the amount of L1 in EFL classes (Sub-theme 1-1). Another example of the influence of teaching experience has been demonstrated in an excerpt from the interview with T9 when he explained about L1 use for teaching grammar (Sub-theme 5-1). Similarly, T3 referred to her language teaching experience when she elucidated how to manage discipline problems in EFL classes by using L1 (Sub-theme 7-2). By the same token, Borg (2009) highlighted the influence of teaching experience on teachers' cognition. In addition, an example of the impact of colleagues' teaching experience has been shown in an excerpt from the interview with T2 when he described the misunderstanding that might happen as a result of L1 use, by referring to one of his colleagues teaching experience (Sub-theme 1-3). Likewise, Rabbidge (2017) accentuated the impact of colleagues on teachers' cognition of L1 utilization in EFL classes. Also, instances of the effect of EFL learners' needs and expectations have been manifested in the interviews. For example, there were references, made by T2 and T9, to learners' needs and preferences (Theme 4). In a similar way, results of Rabbidge's (2017) study displayed the effects of learners on teachers' cognition.

## 6. Conclusion

This qualitative research was an attempt to explore Iranian teachers' cognition of L1 utilization in L2 instruction as a component of classroom management in EFL classes of language schools. The participants in the setting of this study believed that the extent and frequency of L1 use should be carefully balanced with the overall goals and objectives of L2 instruction, ensuring that learners would be continually exposed to and challenged in the target language. They also emphasized that teachers should encourage learners to think in the target language and to avoid relying on L1 as much as possible, since this might hinder their language development and fluency. Moreover, the participating teachers held that in order to effectively manage EFL classes, teachers should use L1 sparingly, strategically, and judiciously; that is, L1 use should be considered the last resort. Besides, they were cognizant that teachers should pay attention to their learners' English language proficiency level, as low-proficiency learners might need more L1 use in EFL lessons. Moreover, the participants accentuated the significance of psychological factors concerning L1 use in L2 teaching. They believed that although judicious L1 use could decrease classroom anxiety, its excessive

use could decrease learners' motivation and autonomy. Furthermore, they foregrounded attention to learners' needs, wants, expectations, and preferences regarding the utilization of L1 in EFL classes. Additionally, they knew about the possibility of L1 use for teaching language sub-skills of grammar and vocabulary. As for main language skills, they believed in the possibility of L1 use for teaching writing. They were aware of the potential impact of using L1 on various management strategies. They asserted that L1 use could aid in establishing and maintaining rapport, solving discipline problems, managing time, giving instruction for tasks, breaking ice during warmer of lessons, and reducing TTT.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrated that the participants exhibited a well-developed conceptual understanding of L1 utilization in L2 instruction as a classroom management component within the context of EFL instruction at language schools. Also, the study's findings identified various factors, including language learning experience, pre-service teacher training, teaching experience, colleagues' teaching experience, and learners' expectations and needs, might shape teachers' conceptualization of L1 use as a classroom management component. This study has implications for supervisors of language schools in EFL contexts, EFL teachers, and language teacher educators. The study's results can inform language schools' supervisors about teachers' cognition, which can help them observe and evaluate teachers' classroom practice in a new light. Further, EFL teachers can gain insight into the appropriate use of L1 for classroom management by reviewing the study's findings. In addition, the study's findings can provide teacher educators with a foundation for designing enhanced pre-service and in-service teacher training programs aimed at refining teachers' cognition. It is essential to note a warning about the current research when considering the generalizability of the results. Consistent with Dörnyei's (2007) assertion regarding qualitative research, the conclusions drawn from this study, as with many qualitative inquiries, are contextually bound and may not be generalizable to other settings. However, as Dörnyei (2007) asserts, qualitative exploration is not oriented toward attaining generalizability. Moreover, Borg (2006) maintains that inquiry into teachers' cognition is fundamentally context-dependent.

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