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ЕФЕКТИВНІ МЕТОДИ В EFL:

ПЕРЕКОНАННЯ ТА ДОСВІД ВИКЛАДАЧІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ ЩОДО ВИКОРИСТАННЯ РІДНОЇ МОВИ

Анотація. Питання використання рідної мови (L1) під час вивчення іноземних мов є спірним, оскільки освітні експерти та викладачі висловлюють протилежні думки. Це дослідження присвячено цій проблемі та вивчає переконання та досвід викладачів університетів щодо використання L1 в навчанні англійської як іноземної (EFL). У дослідженні використано змішаний метод для збору кількісних та якісних даних за допомогою онлайн-анкети. Учасниками стали викладачі EFL з України (32), які надали усвідомлену згоду на заповнення анкети в грудні 2024 року. Аналіз передбачав використання медіани (Mdn) та міжквартильного діапазону (IQR) на п'ятибальній шкалі Лайкерта. Значна підтримка використання L1 серед учасників вказує на потенційні переваги рідної мови в умовах EFL, однак значна кількість тих, хто вагається або проти, свідчить про необхідність постійного діалогу. Хоча багато освітян вважають L1 цінним ресурсом для покращення вивчення іноземної мови, існують певні розбіжності щодо її використання. Висновки дослідження свідчать про те, що L1 регулярно застосовується під час занять EFL, що вказує на спільний вибір освітян щодо ступеня інтеграції рідної мови під час навчання іноземній мові. Отримані дані свідчать про те, що більшість університетських викладачів мають тенденцію періодично використовувати рідну мову під час занять, тоді як досить помітна меншість приділяє перевагу використанню тільки англійської. Викладачі університету загалом підтримують помірне використання L1 серед студентів, визнаючи її цінність у процесі навчання, але разом з тим також наголошуючи на важливості іноземної мови. Результати дослідження вказують на те, що освітяни коригують визначення оптимального балансу між заохоченням вживати англійську мову та дозволом студентам використовувати L1 для допомоги або роз'яснення на занятті EFL. Університетські викладачі визнають переваги інтеграції L1 у викладання EFL, яке сприяє кращому розумінню та підвищує ефективність навчання. Однак, за словами половини респондентів, вони вважають, що вживання рідної мови може призвести до надмірної залежності від неї та гальмувати прогрес студентів, що вивчають англійську мову.

Ключові слова: викладачі університету; студенти університету; перша мова (L1); друга мова (L2); англійська як іноземна мова (EFL).

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EFFECTIVE METHODS IN EFL:

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES REGARDING THE FIRST LANGUAGE USE

Abstract. The issue of using first language (L1) in foreign language classrooms has been controversial, with experts and practitioners expressing opinions ranging from demands to exclude L1 to its integration. This study addresses this gap and investigates university teachers' beliefs and practices of L1 use in EFL. The study utilized a mixed-method research design to gather quantitative and qualitative data via an online survey. The participants are EFL university teachers (No. = 32) from Ukraine who provided informed consent to complete a survey in December 2024. The analysis employed median (Mdn) and Inter-Quartile Range (IQR) on a five-point Likert scale to demonstrate prevalent choices and levels of agreement among respondents. The strong endorsement of L1 usage among participants indicates its potential benefits in EFL environments, yet the significant number of those hesitant or opposed suggests a need for ongoing dialogue about its role. While many educators see L1 as a valuable resource for enhancing language learning, there is some variation in the strength of their

opinions on its use. Overall, the findings show that L1 is regularly used in EFL lessons, suggesting a lack of substantial disagreement among educators regarding the extent of its incorporation in teaching. The data indicates that most university teachers tend to periodically integrate L1 into their instruction, while a notable minority prefers a strictly English-only approach. University teachers generally support a moderate use of L1 among their students, acknowledging its value in the learning process while also emphasizing the importance of L2. The findings reflect educators' nuanced perspective on finding an optimal balance between encouraging English language use and permitting students to use L1 for assistance or clarification in EFL lessons. University educators recognize the benefits of incorporating L1 into EFL teaching, as it enhances comprehension and learning efficiency. However, concerns were noted by half of the respondents, who believe that reliance on L1 could lead to dependency on it and potentially impede students' progress in English.

Keywords: university teachers; university students; the first language (L1); the second language (L2); English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Actuality. The issue of using the first language (L1) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains a topic widely discussed by educators, university officials, students, and those interested in language study. Considering this, further investigations are necessary to prove the pedagogical value of L1 use in EFL lessons.

Literature review. L1 refers to a person's first language or native language, the language they acquire naturally during early childhood and typically use most fluently. It serves as the foundation for cognitive and linguistic development and often influences learning additional languages, such as second language (L2) [15]. Multilingualism is becoming increasingly prevalent, presenting not only benefits but also challenges for educators, who often grapple with the contrast between monolingual policies and the multilingual realities of modern classrooms [4]. Many teachers view multilingualism and collaborative language use as advantageous, favoring translanguaging approaches that blend languages over strict separation in teaching practices [14].

The growing interest in the role of L1 in English learning has sparked research in EFL contexts [1], revealing that bilingualism enhances communication and interaction by allowing flexible language choices [8]. Research indicates that incorporating L1 into L2 instruction can significantly enhance speaking and writing skills for beginning learners when compared to L2-only instruction [5]. Additionally, the purposeful use of L1 can particularly benefit adult learners, suggesting a need for further research on its advantages [15]. In EFL classrooms, teachers tend to employ L1 positively, although it is primarily used in their utterances and is distributed nearly equally among different activities [12]. A study of a university-level Spanish course quantified a teacher's language usage, exploring L1's purposes and perceptions to enhance classroom practices and underscoring the importance of self-recording for teacher professional development, aiming to improve L2 instruction methods [7]. Another research study demonstrates that using L1 in feedback has a lasting positive impact on learning, supporting previous findings that suggest that the inclusion of L1 can improve comprehension and overall academic achievement in language education [10].

However, some educators object to the use of L1 in EFL lessons arguing that students should think in English and not translate all the time; ideas can be explained in many other ways; word-for-word translation is not helpful [6], [11]. Using the target language underscores its significance and creates real-life situations when English is the only option in a multilingual environment [13]. The issue of using L1 in foreign language classrooms has been controversial, with experts and practitioners expressing opinions ranging from demands to exclude L1 to its integration [11], [16]. Many studies prove L1 to be helpful or counter-productive, leaving the findings far from convincing.

The aim of the article. This study addresses this gap and investigates university teachers' beliefs and practices of L1 use in EFL. The key research questions in this research are:

1. What are university teachers' attitudes and practices regarding L1 use?
2. What are their perceptions of L1 use in EFL lessons?
3. What are the pros and cons of L1 use in EFL lessons?

Materials and methods. The study utilized a mixed-method research design to gather quantitative and qualitative data via an online survey. An anonymous questionnaire was designed for university teachers to explore their beliefs and practices regarding L1 use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The participants comprised 32 EFL university teachers from Ukraine who provided informed consent to complete a survey in December 2024. The online survey, hosted on Google Forms, consisted of four sections: demographic information (3 questions), attitudes and practices regarding L1 use (6 questions), perceptions of L1 use (4 questions), and the advantages and disadvantages of L1 in EFL lessons (2 questions). Participants responded to closed-ended questions for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative insights. The analysis employed median (Mdn) and Inter-Quartile Range (IQR) on a five-point Likert scale to demonstrate prevalent choices and levels of agreement among respondents. Data collection was facilitated through Google Forms, and distributed via social media and email.

Results and Discussion. 1. Background Information. It is important to reveal the diversity within the respondents in terms of their age, gender, and work experience. The survey results indicated that 50% of the university teachers who participated in the research were aged between 35 and 44 years, while a smaller portion fell within the 25 to 34 age range, the remainder were over 45 years old (See Figure 1).

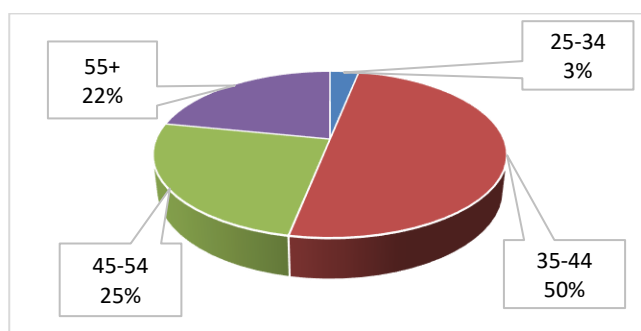


Fig. 1. The respondents' age

The demographic profile of the surveyed university teachers suggests a predominantly middle-aged workforce, indicating potential implications for the teaching practices and perspectives on L1 usage in EFL, as this age group may bring varying experiences and insights compared to younger or older educators. In terms of gender, the majority of the participants were female, making up 97% of the respondents. Regarding teaching experience, 50% had between 11 and 20 years, just under half had over 20 years, while the remainder were novice teachers with 3 to 5 years of experience (see Figure 2).

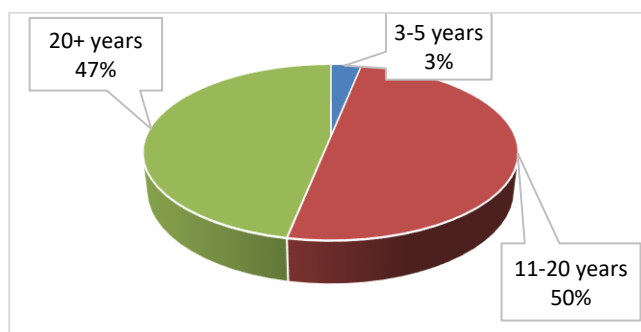


Fig. 2. The respondents' teaching experience in years

The data reveals a significant gender imbalance among the university teachers who are mostly women, alongside a well-established cohort with substantial teaching experience.

2. University teachers' attitudes towards using L1 in EFL. The research findings revealed that over 50% of participants viewed the use of L1 positively in EFL classrooms, about 25% expressed negative attitudes, and the remaining respondents were undecided (see Figure 3).

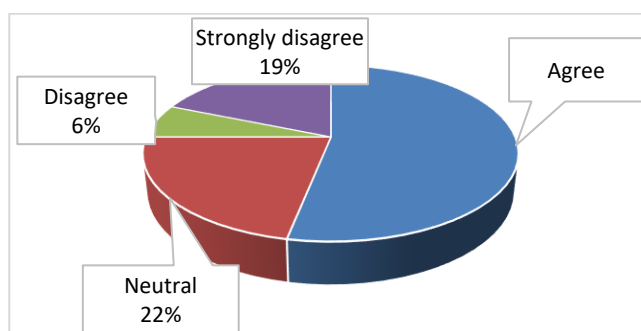


Fig. 3. University teachers' attitudes towards the positive impact of L1 on teaching/learning English

Therefore, the predominant support for L1 usage among participants suggests that it may be a beneficial practice in EFL settings, although the notable proportion of those who hesitate or are against its usage indicates a need for continued discussion and exploration of its role. The responses highlight a balanced perspective on L1 use in EFL lessons. Frequent L1 use can lead to reliance on translations, potentially hindering learners' ability to think directly in English, especially at lower levels where it can aid comprehension and reduce anxiety: "students are less stressed while learning a new language." Many educators see L1 as a valuable tool for scaffolding and clarifying complex grammar and vocabulary, facilitating better understanding and retention of concepts: "L1 and L2 can be compared to find similarities or differences." It is particularly beneficial for beginners, as it saves time and effort when explaining difficult material. With students' progress, however, it is important to gradually reduce L1 use to encourage more immersion and fluency in the target

language: “As students advance, the use of L1 should gradually diminish.” Ultimately, the effective application of L1 should depend on the learners’ proficiency levels and specific educational contexts. Hanafiah et al. state that bilingualism enables lecturers and students to choose the language for their interactions, facilitating various activities such as entertaining, translating, clarifying, asking questions, and providing feedback [8]. Thus, by using L1, both parties can sustain interaction and enhance communication by reducing their affective filter [8], [15, p.5]. However, L1 use encourages word-for-word translation, which is not effective. In addition, if a teacher and students do not speak the same L1, it cannot be used in EFL lessons [6, p.70]. The survey results indicated that over half of the respondents (56%) occasionally used L1, while approximately 30% reported using it rarely or not at all (See Figure 4).

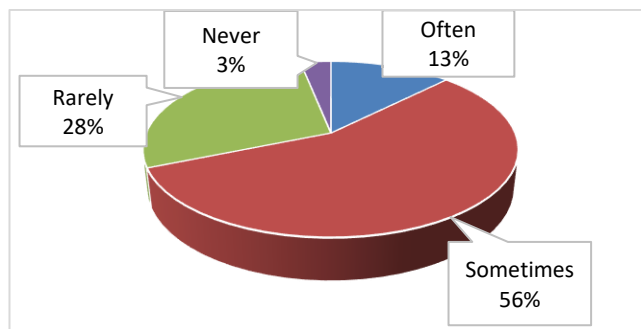


Fig. 4. Frequency of university teachers' use of L1 in EFL lessons

The data suggests a prevailing tendency among university teachers to intermittently incorporate L1 in their teaching, although a significant minority appears to favor a more exclusive approach to English-only instruction. The responses indicate a nuanced approach to L1 use in EFL lessons, emphasizing its selective application based on student proficiency levels. While L1 can facilitate understanding, especially for low-level students and complex topics like grammar or ESP terminology (“some notions need explanations in L1”), many university teachers advocate for minimizing its use to promote English immersion and boost students’ confidence in using the target language (“use communicative approach”). Some university teachers utilize L1 primarily for translations and explanations when students struggle, while others maintain that exposing students to L2 should be a priority to enhance language acquisition. Overall, the effectiveness of L1 use should be context-dependent, catering to the learners’ needs and language abilities. The results of another research showed that EFL teachers utilized a limited amount of L1 in the classroom, yet employed it for various purposes to enhance their teaching effectiveness and support student learning [1]. However, relying too much on L1 university teachers could impede students’ English language development [12]. This may reflect varying pedagogical philosophies regarding balancing L1 and L2 in language acquisition. University teachers reported that their students utilized L1 at various frequencies, with 62% indicating it was used sometimes, 16% stating it was used rarely, and another 16% observing it being used often (See Figure 5).

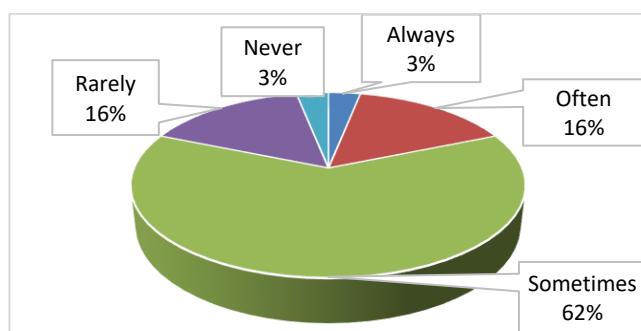


Fig. 5. Frequency of university students' use of L1 in EFL lessons

Only a small portion of teachers (6%) believed that L1 was either never or always employed (See Figure 5). The findings suggest that the majority of teachers perceive a sporadic use of L1 among their students, indicating a nuanced approach to language use in the classroom rather than a strict adherence to either exclusively using L1 or L2. This variability highlights the importance of understanding the contextual factors that influence language choices in educational settings. University teachers’ comments about students’ L1 use reveal a range of perspectives on its role in the language learning process. While some educators acknowledge that L1 can facilitate understanding of new vocabulary and complex concepts, especially among lower-level students with limited English proficiency, others express concern that its frequent use may disrupt immersion and hinder natural language acquisition “by pulling learners out of the English context.” Students often resort

to L1 when they struggle to express themselves or need to “clear up the confusing words”, using it for support during group work or discussions. In some cases, it is more efficient to use an equivalent in L1 to show the meaning of a lexical unit instead of lengthy explanations in L2 [6, p.70].

However, in our study university teachers emphasize the importance of practicing foreign language skills, noting that as students “feel confident and comfortable enough to convey their ideas in English”, reliance on L1 decreases. Overall, the effectiveness of L1 usage depends on students’ proficiency levels and contextual needs. According to another research, it is essential to facilitate successful interaction, negotiation, and the expression of opinions in the target language through pair and group work activities [9, p.227]. There is no point in neglecting breakout rooms as they present a valuable opportunity for students to engage in peer-to-peer interactions, significantly boosting their practice time in collaborative pair or small group settings [3, p.16].

3. University teachers’ perceptions of L1 use in EFL lessons. The survey results reveal that university teachers assume students should use L1 either sometimes (47%) or rarely (47%), while the remaining respondents choose either never or often (See Figure 6).

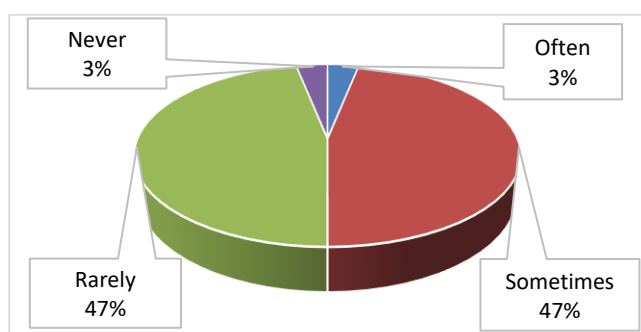


Fig. 6. How often should your students use L1 in EFL lessons?

In conclusion, the findings indicate that university teachers generally accept a moderate use of L1 among their students, suggesting that they recognize its potential role in the learning process, especially “when learners face challenges comprehending complex topics.” However, the responders also promote a focus on L2 as “practice in English is vital for language acquisition” and students “are not here to become interpreters, but speakers of English.” This mixed expectation may reflect a balanced approach to language instruction that accommodates varying student needs and learning environments. Another research claims the need to limit reliance on L1 use and recognizes its benefits for students, which emphasizes the urgent need to gradually integrate pedagogical translanguaging into current curricula [14].

The survey indicates that university teachers believe L1 should be used either sometimes (44%) or rarely (44%), with 9% asserting that it should never be utilized. In conclusion, these responses suggest that university teachers lean towards a moderate use of L1 in the classroom stating that “the teacher should provide translation of unknown words, translation of grammar explanation,” reflecting a preference for balancing L1 and L2 to support language learning while minimizing potential overreliance on the native language by “using different methods to explain in L2”. This perspective may indicate an understanding of the benefits and limitations of L1 in the educational context (see Figure 7).

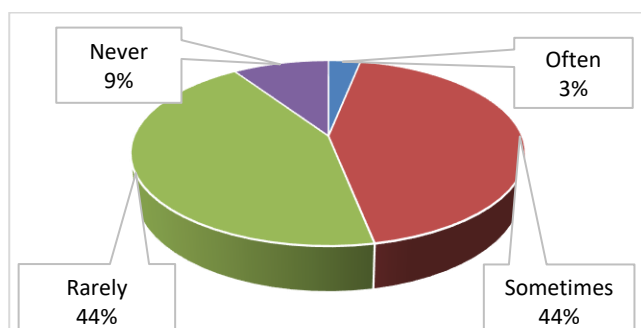


Fig. 7. How often should teachers use L1 in EFL lessons?

The findings of the prior research suggested that L1 use can facilitate student learning in EFL contexts and should not be excluded from classroom syllabi or viewed negatively [1]. A similar study that discusses the use of students’ L1 in L2 teaching from university educators’ perspectives argues that purposeful L1 use can enhance language learning, especially for adults, warranting further research on its benefits [15].

4. Pros and Cons of Using L1 in EFL lessons. Considering the advantages of integrating the first language (L1) into EFL lessons, university teachers argue that it significantly improves students' grasp of grammar (29%), aids in vocabulary acquisition (23%), streamlines lesson time (22%), and increases students' confidence (19%) (See Figure 8).

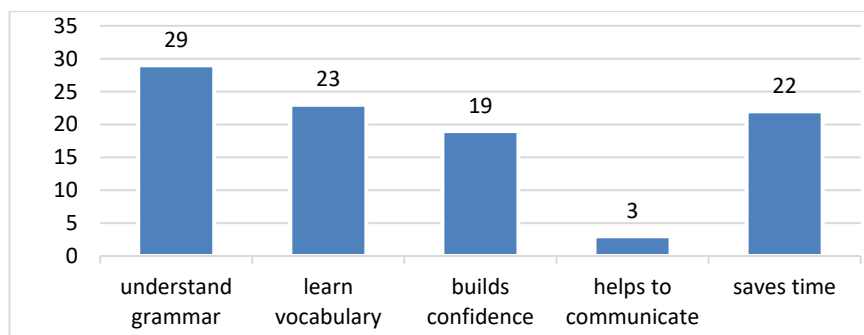


Fig. 8. What are the advantages of using L1 in EFL lessons?

Therefore, the perceptions of university educators highlight the advantages of using L1, suggesting that its integration into EFL teaching not only aids comprehension and efficiency but also plays a significant role in fostering a supportive and confident learning environment for students. Subsequent studies underscored the benefits of incorporating L1 into bilingual education and language acquisition, regarding prior L1 knowledge as a valuable facilitator and a potentially more crucial role for L1 in L2 development [15], [5].

Reflecting on the main drawbacks, half of the respondents believe that L1 use can lead students to overly depend on their native language, and may hinder their progress in English (16%). Some university teachers think that L1 use can take precious time (12%), and confuse students (6%). Indeed, EFL lessons could be the only opportunity for students to practice L2 [6, p.7]. In conclusion, while L1 use in language instruction has its benefits, these potential drawbacks highlight the need for a balanced approach to ensure effective language learning.

The survey results suggest a moderate positive perception regarding the role of the L1 in teaching and learning English. The median (Mdn) of 2 indicates that respondents generally lean towards the view that L1 is beneficial in EFL lessons, while the interquartile range (IQR) of 1.25 reflects a moderate level of agreement among participants, implying that opinions on the effectiveness of L1 vary somewhat. Overall, many educators recognize L1 as a valuable tool in enhancing language learning, although some variability in how strongly individuals feel about its usage exists. The results regarding the frequency of L1 use in EFL lessons indicate a generally regular application of L1 by university teachers. The median (Mdn) value of 3 suggests that respondents typically use L1 a moderate amount, the interquartile range (IQR) of 1 indicates that most participants tend to agree on the frequency of L1 usage. This implies that while L1 is employed consistently, there may not be a significant divide among educators on how much it is integrated into their EFL lessons. The results show that according to university teachers, students generally use L1 moderately during lessons. The interquartile range (IQR) of 0 suggests a high level of consensus among respondents, which implies that university teachers perceive a consistent pattern of L1 usage among their students (Table 1).

Table 1.

University teachers' feedback on using L1 in EFL lessons

Likert scale	SD	D	N	A	SA	Median	IQR
1. Does L1 help teaching/learning English in EFL lessons?	0	17	7	2	6	2	1,25
2. How often do you use L1 in EFL lessons?	0	4	18	9	1	3	1
3. How often do your students use L1 in EFL lessons?	1	5	20	5	1	3	0
4. How often should students use L1 in EFL lessons?	0	1	15	15	1	3,5	1
5. How often should a teacher use L1 in EFL lessons?	0	1	14	14	1	3,5	1

The results on the ideal frequency of L1 use by students in EFL lessons show a nuanced view among educators on the optimal balance between promoting English language use and allowing students to seek help or clarification in their native language (Table 1). The data regarding how often teachers should use L1 in EFL lessons reveals a recognition that it can be beneficial for clarifying complex concepts, providing support, and enhancing comprehension, while still emphasizing the importance of immersive English language practice (Table 1). Ultimately, leveraging L1 in EFL instruction fosters a more supportive learning environment. The results of our research are consistent with another study at an Irish university which found that, despite potential concerns, lecturers and students largely support using L1 to aid understanding, ease anxiety, and create a relaxed atmosphere, particularly when clarifying complex concepts or terminology [2].

Conclusions. The demographic profile of the university teachers who participated in the research indicates that the workforce is primarily composed of middle-aged individuals, which may have implications for teaching practices and views on L1 usage in EFL. Additionally, the data shows a notable gender imbalance, with most teachers being women, and highlights a seasoned cohort with considerable teaching experience.

1. University teachers' attitudes and practices regarding L1 use. The strong endorsement of L1 usage among participants indicates its potential benefits in EFL environments, yet the significant number of those hesitant or opposed suggests a need for ongoing dialogue about its role. While many educators see L1 as a valuable resource for enhancing language learning, there is some variation in the strength of their opinions on its use. The data indicates that most university teachers tend to periodically integrate L1 into their instruction, while a notable minority prefers a strictly English-only approach. Overall, the findings show that L1 is regularly used in EFL lessons, suggesting a lack of substantial disagreement among educators regarding the extent of its incorporation in teaching. The findings indicate that most teachers observe intermittent L1 usage among their students, reflecting a flexible approach to language use in the classroom instead of strict adherence to either L1 or L2. According to university teachers, students generally use L1 at a moderate level during lessons, and a strong consensus among respondents suggests a shared perception of consistent L1 usage patterns among students.

2. University teachers' perceptions of L1 use in EFL lessons. University teachers generally support a moderate use of L1 among their students, acknowledging its value in the learning process while also emphasizing the importance of L2. The findings reflect educators' nuanced perspective on finding an optimal balance between encouraging English language use and permitting students to use L1 for assistance or clarification in EFL lessons. The data on the frequency of L1 usage by university teachers in EFL lessons suggests a preference for moderate use of L1 in the classroom. This approach acknowledges the benefits of L1 for clarifying complex concepts and providing support, while still highlighting the importance of fostering immersive English language practice.

3. The pros and cons of L1 use in EFL lessons. University educators recognize the benefits of incorporating L1 into EFL teaching, as it enhances comprehension and efficiency while creating a supportive and confident learning atmosphere. However, concerns were noted by half of the respondents, who believe that reliance on L1 could lead to dependency on the native language and potentially impede students' progress in English.

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