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## **First Language Use in English Language Institutes: Are Teachers Free to Alternate between L1 and L2 as Means of Instruction?**

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### **Abstract**

Once severely rejected, first language (L1) use is no more considered to be inherently detrimental in foreign language pedagogy. Recent research within sociocultural framework has come up with numerous facilitative roles for L1 use (Anton and DiCamilla, 1999; Swain and Lapkin, 2000; Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003). Also, studies from humanistic perspectives that deal with the teachers' and learners' attitudes about L1 use report generally positive attitudes from both groups (Duff and Polio, 1990; Macaro, 2001). However, contrary to this bulk of theoretical and empirical support, there seems to have been an evident animosity towards L1 use in the Iranian private English language institutes. The present research was therefore designed to delve deeper into the apparent discrepancy between theory and practice in this regard by identifying some contextual constraints on the teachers' language choice. After preliminary exploratory interviews and a small-scale pilot study to make sure of the reliability and validity of the instruments, two separate sets of questionnaires for young learners' parents (243 participants) and teachers (31 participants) were designed and administered. The results of the analyses showed that both parents and teachers held significantly negative attitudes towards L1 use. The findings also indicated that parents reflect their negative attitudes to the institutes so as to hamper L1 use by talking directly to the teachers, threatening to change institutes in the case of dissatisfaction, and influencing the institute principals' policies about L1 use.

**Keywords:** first language use, young learners, private language institutes, parental expectations

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### 1. Introduction

Language teaching pedagogy has tended to ignore or even suppress first language (L1) use for long, endorsing a predominantly monolingual policy (Cook, 2001). The roots of such ‘English-only’ policies, encouraging teachers and learners to merely use the target language (TL) as the means of communication in language classes, can be traced back to the widespread hostility towards the tenets of the Grammar-Translation method, the decline of contrastive analysis in language pedagogy, and the rising popularity of the Direct Method in early twentieth century, one unfaltering principle of which was the exclusion of any kind of recourse to L1 (Sampson, 2011). More recent methods such as communicative and task-based language teaching methods have not been amicable to L1 use either. In fact, as Cook (2001) argues, although these methods have not had any necessary relation with the L1, they have constantly been giving advice on how to minimize its use. Maximum exposure to TL input, as asserted by Krashen’s Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (CIH) and Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (IH), was also believed to have a crucial role in language learning (Ellis, 2008). Therefore, not surprisingly, L1 exclusion was a central promise in most methods of the era.

New perspectives from Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory (SCT) towards learning shed new insights to the potential role of the L1 by providing “a powerful explanatory framework for conceptualizing what is involved in language learning” (Wells, 1999, p. 249). Contrary to the CIH and IH perspectives which were criticized for presenting an impoverished and reductionist view of second and foreign language learning, interaction is not simply regarded as a tool for generating comprehensible input in SCT. Learning, in SCT, is believed to be mediated by cultural artifacts, one of the most significant of which is language. The theory also maintains that there is a dialectical relation between the learner and the social world. Therefore, learners are not just passive recipients of language input and teachers are not just providers of input. Rather, the learners, the teacher, and the sociocultural context in which the discourse takes place cooperatively constitute what is being learned. (Tsui, 2008).

Recent research within a sociocultural framework has counted out numerous facilitative functions for L1 use by language learners and teachers. Studies in this regard can be categorized in three broad domains. A great bulk of studies has attempted to identify the functions of L1 use by learners (Anton and DiCamilla, 1999; Villamil and de Guerrero, 1996; Swain and Lapkin, 2000; Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003; Centeno-Cortes and

Jimenez, 2004; Scott and De la Fuente, 2008). A second group of studies have identified functions of L1 use by teachers (Macaro, 2001; Kraemer, 2006; Nassaji and de la Campa, 2009; Copland and Neokleous, 2010). And yet another group has dealt with teachers' and learners' attitudes towards L1 use (Duff and Polio, 1990; Macaro, 2001; Levine, 2003; Brooks-Lewis, 2009), the majority of which have suggested that both learners and teachers hold positive attitudes about judicious use of the first language.

The findings of these studies supporting judicious L1 use, however, do not seem to be implemented in real language teaching contexts. That is, as Cummins (2007) posited, it seems that "instructional policies are dominated by monolingual instructional principles that are largely unsupported by empirical evidence and inconsistent with the current understanding both of how people learn and the functioning of the bilingual and multilingual mind" (p. 222). In much the same vein, Sampson (2011, p. 2) also argued that "the reality remains that even in many of today's most sophisticated learning centers, 'English-only' wall signs can be found alongside the interactive whiteboards, and systems of forfeits for 'rule breakers' form part of everyday class routine." On the one hand, numerous facilitative functions for L1 use have been identified and both teachers and learners have been reported to hold positive attitudes towards its use; however, L1 use is mostly deemed to be an uncongenial practice in many language teaching contexts. This apparent discrepancy between theory and practice has barely been touched upon. In one of these infrequent studies, Nagy and Robertson (2009) came up with a list of "external factors" that, they believed, altered teachers' decisions about language choice to a large extent. Their list comprised factors such as expectations in the school, the attitudes of head teachers, colleagues, parents, and the political context. The context of their research was the public language schools in Hungary. Nevertheless, the extent to which each of these factors -and other possible factors- are influential in a private language teaching context might widely vary. The present study was hence designed to investigate the contextual constraints on L1 use in some Iranian private language institutes. Before anything, however, it seems vital to provide background information about the context within which these institutes are operating.

Similar to any other firms or companies operating in the private sector, Iranian private language institutes are not publicly funded, and hence survive on the financial resources provided by learners' families. This very fact might generate certain circumstances in these institutes incomparable to public institutes which are mostly funded by the state. By the same token,

private institutes may be much more concerned with the expectations of adult learners and young learners' parents, the withdrawal of whose money may precipitate severe financial crises in these institutes. Consequently, any investigation of the institutional policies without taking the expectations of all language learning stakeholders, including learners and their families into account may not yield a comprehensive view of how decisions are made in private institutes as such. Therefore, the present study was designed to investigate the contextual constraints on young learners' teachers' language choice in private language institutes with an emphasis on the constraints imposed on them by young learners' parents.

## **2. Literature Review**

The issue of whether or not learners' L1 should be given a role in L2 teaching has always been a controversial one. The discussion favoring L1 use has often been either grounded in the perspectives of the SCT towards learning, investigating the functions of L1 use by learners and teachers, or in psychological and humanistic considerations delving into the learners' and teachers' attitudes towards L1 use. What follows is a brief review of some of the studies conducted within each of the mentioned frameworks.

### **2.1 Functions of L1 use by learners**

The majority of the studies investigating functions of L1 use by learners are grounded in sociocultural perspectives towards learning. Hence, central to the apprehension of functions of L1 use by learners is the understanding of some of the key concepts in Vygotsky's SCT. This theory regards cognitive development, or the transformation of elementary mental processes into higher orders, as an inherently social enterprise. According to Vygotsky, learning and development originate collaboratively in social interactions between humans, namely the novice and the more knowledgeable members of communities. Hence, language, as a very crucial cultural tool, plays a major role in human cognitive development, since it mediates not only our relationships with others, but also our own mental activity (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006).

In social interaction as a whole, and more specifically in the context of second language teaching, language allows the teacher to capture the learner's attention, to explain the requirements of an activity, and to offer assistance finely tuned to the learners' needs (Storch and Aldosari, 2011) or scaffolded help (Wood et al., 1976, cited in Anton and DiCamilla, 1999). The provision of scaffolded help within the learners' Zone of Proximal

Development (ZPD), in turn, pushes the learners' independent problem solving ability forward. Vygotsky (1978) defines ZPD as "the difference between the child's developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential developments as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

Language, in the form of private speech, can also mediate our own mental activities. Private speech, or the speech directed to oneself, may be either fully externalized or whispered or even sub-vocal, and hence merely audible to the speaker (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Either way, research (Centeno-Cortes and Jimenez, 2004) has shown that private speech empowers L2 learners to direct their attention to particular aspects of a given task, to deliberate and evaluate their ideas.

Also important in this theory is Vygotsky's distinction between actual and proximal types of development. According to him, while the former deals with the functions that have "already matured", the latter is concerned with "those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation", that is "the functions that will mature tomorrow, but are currently in an embryonic state" (p. 86). The gap between actual and proximal types of development, Vygotsky believes, can be bridged by the presence of "scaffolded help", that is as implied in the definition of ZPD, "under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." One of the ways to provide learners with scaffolded help, according to some research findings, is to let them use their L1 while engaged in collaborative tasks. Apart from being a scaffolding tool, however, L1 plays a handful of other functions identified in empirical investigations of learners' collaborative interactions.

In a seminal study, focusing on the use of L1 in the collaborative interaction of adult learners of Spanish engaged in writing three informative paragraphs, Anton and DiCamilla (1999) found that L1 served a critical function in helping students to achieve mutual understanding about various aspects of the task, that is to maintain intersubjectivity, which in turn lets them provide each other with scaffolded help, and externalize their inner speech. Schwarzer and Luke (2001, in Brooks-Lewis, 2009) also suggested a number of vital roles for L1 in L2 learning process, which were not much different from what Anton and DiCamilla projected. They believed that L1 is crucial as a scaffolding tool, as a vehicle for establishing intersubjectivity and as a psychological tool for regulation and task orientation. An emblem of this latter stage, according to Vygotsky, is the presence of inner speech or

private talk. Centeno-Cortes and Jimenez (2004, p.31) focused on this point and stated that as far as problem-solving tasks are concerned, private verbal thinking which is done in L1 “plays a crucial role in the case of L2 speakers [...] and, therefore, it should be recognized as significant in the process of learning.”

In another interesting study, focusing on the stories written by student pairs as the outcome of dictogloss or jigsaw tasks, Swain and Lapkin (2000) reported that the students used their L1 for three principal purposes: (1) moving the task along, (2) focusing attention, and (3) interpersonal interaction. Within a sociocultural framework, Storch and Wigglesworth’s (2003) study of English learners, engaged in joint composition and reconstruction tasks also revealed that students used their shared L1s for task management, testing clarification, determining meaning and vocabulary, and explaining grammar.

Having analyzed the discourse of Spanish-speaking university students engaged this time in peer revision of their L2 writing, Villamil and De Guerrero (1996) also came up with some functions of L1 use by learners doing writing tasks. Based on the data collected from the discourse of learners engaged in peer revision of their L2 writing, they concluded that L1 was an essential tool for making meaning of texts, retrieving language from memory, explaining and expanding content, guiding their action through the task, and maintaining dialogue.

In a study based on reading comprehension exercises, Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001) found that the role L1 plays is much greater than being simply a linguistic decoder. Applying think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews with 20 native speakers of Chinese and Japanese at three levels of language proficiency, they reported that “L2 readers attempted to construct on an intrapsychological, or cognitive plane a scaffold using their own expertise in their L1 as a means of pushing their L2 competence beyond its current level” (p. 491).

In another study, comparing the teacher-student and student-student interactions of their subjects, Guk and Kellogg (2007) stated that much of the meta-language talk among the latter group was an integration of L1 and L2. This, in their view, increased the learners’ control over the mediational means, which according to Vygotsky is language, and hence allows the learners “to progress from other-mediation to self-mediation, that is to no mediation at all [appropriation]” (p. 292)

The literature abounds with similar studies in this regard; however, with a closer look it is possible to categorize all their findings about the

functions of L1 use by learners under four broad categories: language related functions, task related functions, interpersonal functions, and intrapersonal functions. The numerous functions attributed to these four categories imply that bereaving learners of the opportunities L1 provides does not seem to be a sound decision.

## 2.2 Functions of L1 use by teachers

Also based on the tenets of the SCT, there are studies dealing with the identification of the teachers' L1 use functions. The majority of these studies are descriptive, trying to delineate how L1 is used in L2 classes. Several patterns of L1 use have been identified in different studies which are nevertheless more or less in line with Cook's (2001) contentions. He argued that teachers can use L1 to convey meaning, for instance, by checking the meaning of words or sentences or explaining grammar. He also put that teachers can use L1 for classroom organization purposes, such as organizing tasks, maintaining discipline or communicating with individual students. These four general functions of L1 use are also identified with more details in other studies utilizing empirical data.

Kraemer (2006) identified eight functions of the first language utilized by English teachers of German as a foreign language. According to him, L1 was used "most frequently for purposes of classroom management and administrative vocabulary, translation of individual words, repetition, or explanation to remedy and prevent students' lack of comprehension, and when talking to individual students during pair or group work" (p. 447).

In a similar vein, de la Campa and Nassaji (2009) came up with a list of L1 functions used by a novice and an expert teacher. Their list comprised instances of translation, activity instruction, personal comment, code-switching (bilingual behavior), administrative issues, elicitation of student contribution, reaction to student question, L1-L2 contrast, repetition of student L1 utterance, comprehension check, humor, evaluation, activity objective, and classroom equipment. Copland and Neokleous (2010) also, based on their interviews and observations, came up with fairly similar findings. They reported that teachers used L1 for organizing tasks, explaining or revising language skills and systems, instructions, question and answer, reprimands, jokes, praises, translating markers, providing hints, and giving opinions.

Having found a discrepancy between professional ideas and real teacher beliefs, Warford (2007, p. 57) stated that "teaching culture and grammar, disciplining, and the 'nuts and bolts' of running a class are areas

teachers appear to approach in L1, a decision that may be rooted in issues of practicality and time-efficiency.” Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) also, as a part of their findings, concluded that the first language is used by the teachers for the sake of translation, commenting on forms, and class management. Liu, Ahn, Baek, and Han, (2004) also came up with fairly similar results, and argued that the teachers participating in their study used L1 mostly to explain grammar and vocabulary, provide textual background information, and highlight important points.

There are yet other studies which have dealt with how much L1 teachers use in their classes (Macaro, 2001; Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie, 2002; Duff and Polio, 1990; Liu et al., 2004; Song, 2009; Kim and Elder, 2005). The findings of these studies have generally implied that teachers’ amount of L1 use widely varies in different contexts. In fact it was reported to range from 0% to 90% of the whole class talk in different contexts. However, as Song (2009) believes, it seems to be a plausible conclusion to make that regardless of the teaching context, teachers can hardly ban L1 when they share it with the learners.

Shifting from the functions and amounts of L1 use to why teachers either opt to use or to ban L1, Ford (2009) stated that pragmatism, individual beliefs, and personality are the influential factors. She also posited that the teachers who used the first language (Japanese in this case) in their classes clarified the purpose as primarily humor, creating a relaxed atmosphere, giving instructions and task directions. However, according to her, none of the teachers under the study seemed to have developed systematic criteria about when and how L1 should be used by their learners and themselves.

Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) also found that giving or not giving L1 a role seems to depend on factors related both to the teaching context and to personal variables, such as local policy, the level of instruction and level of students’ proficiency, lesson contents, objectives and materials, the teachers’ pedagogical training, experience in the TL culture, and perceived program goals. Therefore, all these possible intervening factors may well justify Inbar-Lourie’s (2010) surprise, who contended that “the most striking realization that arises from the findings is the marked variability among teachers in terms of their L1 practices, which can occur even within the same institution” (p. 356).

It is also likely that all these intervening factors have had long lasting effects on teachers’ attitudes about L1 use. Horst, White, and Bell (2010), targeting the same issue, beautifully expressed their concern about the issue by putting that



The ability to help learners link new information to knowledge they already have is the hallmark of effective teaching in many instructional contexts. But sadly, in the case of language teaching this view has been so strongly discouraged that generations of teachers have become convinced that referring to the first language in the second language classroom is somehow detrimental. It is not obvious that these views will be easily changed (p. 347).

Based on the abovementioned studies, L1 seems to serve a variety of functions in real practice, which might be why its exclusion has not been practically warranted. In other words, no matter what the teachers' attitudes about L1 use are, they are using it in their classes, and this may mean that it is utterly undesirable for them to do without it.

### **2.3 Teachers' and learners' attitudes towards L1 use**

Edstrom (2006, p. 289) suggests that L1 use is a "subjective issue," by which he means that the decision whether or not to use the L1 could be a direct or indirect function of the way the teachers or learners perceive it. In line with this argument, some other researchers have focused on teachers' and learners' attitudes towards first language use.

Duff and Polio (1990), as an instance, announced that regardless of how much L1 the teachers used, learners were generally satisfied with the amount of L1/TL use by the teachers. Schweers (1999) also investigated the use of L1 in his monolingual Spanish-speaking classes in Puerto Rico. He noted that a high percentage of students (over 80%) found the use of L1 in the classroom useful. Brooks-Lewis (2009) also reported that learners and teachers hold general positive attitudes about L1 use, though they might not necessarily be clear about when, how, or how much L1 should be used.

Based on the results of a survey, and crying for a more humanistic approach for second language teaching which values the students, their culture, and their language, Burden (2000) reported that a majority of his students wanted the teacher to possess knowledge of their mother tongue, and to use that knowledge in the classroom.

Despite all these supports provided for judicious L1 use in many ways, real-world language teaching systems still seem to discourage L1 use of any kind; and as Jenkins (2010) reported in a recent study, strict L1 prohibition codes are a prominent feature of English language classes in many countries. To address this discrepancy, therefore, the present study was designed to

identify some contextual constraints on teachers' decisions about L1 use by finding answers for the following questions:

1. What attitudes do young learners' teachers hold towards learners' and teachers' use of the L1?
2. What attitudes do young learners' parents hold towards learners' and teachers' use of the L1?
3. Are young learners' parents' attitudes communicated to the teachers? If yes, are the teachers' influenced by parents' attitudes?

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Participants**

The participants of the present study were primarily supposed to include all young learners' parents and teachers in one of the cities of Mazandaran Province, which due to some limitations turned out to be practically impossible. Therefore the data were eventually collected from 15 parents and 10 teachers in the qualitative exploratory phase, and 243 parents and 31 teachers in the final quantitative step with a "convenience or opportunity sampling" (Dornyei, 2007, p. 98) procedure.

#### **3.2 Instruments**

As the literature suggests (Dornyei, 2007; Oppenheim, 1992), close ended multi-scale Likert questionnaires are widely used as an appropriate instrument for the investigation of participants' attitudes regarding a certain issue. To design questionnaire sets as such, however, it is necessary to identify the variables involved in the subject of the enquiry through preliminary exploratory interviews with a small sample of the target population.

##### **3.2.1 Exploratory interviews**

In order to identify the contextual constraints on the use of L1 (Farsi in this case), exploratory interviews were conducted with a small sample of both teachers and parents. Exploratory interviews are primarily concerned with conceptualization of the research problem, and they might involve lengthy, unstructured interviews and talks about the subject of the enquiry. However, as Oppenheim (1992) posited, it must be noted that

The purpose of the exploratory interview is essentially heuristic: to develop ideas and research hypotheses rather than to gather facts and statistics. It is concerned with trying to understand how ordinary people feel about the topics of concern to the research (p. 67).

Implied in this very quotation is the idea that the data collected in this phase is not to be used in the final data analysis. Rather, it is merely used to come up with ideas and variables for the development of subsequent data collection instruments, which was the two questionnaire sets in this study.

Group and one-to-one exploratory interviews in this regard were conducted with a total of 15 parents and 10 teachers. The interview sessions were audio-recorded, and the data were later transcribed and analyzed to identify the recurrent themes. In this vein, first two sets of item pools for parents (85 items) and teachers (82 items) were prepared which were finally reduced to two 37-item sets. The two item pools were also further studied, and at last five recurrent themes were identified for each of them, forming the total ten constraining factors as well. These 10 factors and their corresponding items were then used in construction of the two final questionnaires.

### **3.2.2 The questionnaires**

Two preliminary questionnaires were designed in Farsi, cover letters were provided, and a new section aimed at collecting background information from the participants was added to both questionnaires. Since basic to the validity of any questionnaire is asking the right questions in the least ambiguous way possible (Best and Kahn, 2006), the items in both questionnaires were revised for a couple of times with the help of TEFL and sociology MA students. The participants in this small-scale pilot study were asked to fill in the questionnaires in the presence of one of the researchers to identify any possible ambiguous items so as to assure higher rates of content validity. It also goes without saying that the data collected in this part were not used in the final data analysis. It was supposed to provide the researcher with a clearer understanding of the quality of the items.

#### **3.2.2.1 Teachers' questionnaire**

The five constraining factors identified in the exploratory phase and their 37 corresponding statements (in the form of Likert scales) were used to construct the teachers' questionnaire (appendix A). The participants' answers were accordingly coded as Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), and Strongly Disagree (5). Table 1 introduces these five factors and the distribution of their related items in the teachers' questionnaire.

Table 1. The five factors and distribution of their items in the teachers' questionnaire

Factors	Item Numbers
1. Attitudes towards teachers' L1 non-use	1-8
2. Attitudes towards learners' L1 non-use	9-16
3. Compliance with parents' ideas	17-23
4. Compliance with institute principal's ideas	24-30
5. Conformity to institutional rules	31-37

As shown in the Table, while the first two variables dealt with the teachers' attitudes about their and the learners' L1 use, the three remaining ones focused on the contextual constraints teachers may face in making decisions about language choice. The Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for this questionnaire calculated after data collection equaled 0.78, suggesting an acceptable internal consistency reliability level.

### 3.2.2.2 Parents' questionnaire

Parents' questionnaire (Appendix B) also covered the 5 constraining factors identified in the exploratory phase of the study. Each of these factors included some multi-scale Likert items requiring the participants to check one of the 5 responses ranging from Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), to Strongly Disagree (5). Table 2 depicts the 5 factors and their corresponding items in the parents' questionnaire.

Table 2. The five factors and distribution of their items in the parents' questionnaire

Factors	Item Numbers
1. Attitudes towards teachers' L1 non-use	1-8
2. Attitudes towards learners' L1 non-use	9-16
3. Manipulation of the teacher's practice	17-23
4. Influencing the institute principal's policies	24-30
5. Changing institutes in case of dissatisfaction	31-37

As the Table shows, the first two variables were concerned with young learners' parents' attitudes towards L1 use by teachers and learners in language classes; however, the three other variables dealt with the ways parents might try to have a say in classroom language choice. The Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for this questionnaire, which was calculated after data

collection, was 0.84, implying considerable internal consistency reliability for the instrument.

### **3.3 Data collection**

The study was conducted in six private language institutes in one of the cities of Mazandaran Province during the summer term of 1390. Teachers' questionnaires were directly given to them, most of which were completed and returned within a one week period. Parents' questionnaires were also either directly handed in to them, or given to their children, who were asked by their teachers to have their parents fill them in, and bring them back to class at their earliest convenience within a month. In a brief Farsi cover letter, the research goals were explained to the participants who were assured of the confidentiality of the information as well.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The analysis of the data for the current study was done in SPSS software utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistics. In this regard, first Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to ensure the normal distribution of the data, and then one-sample t-tests were run to determine the significance of the difference between the participants' attitudes towards L1 non-use by teachers and learners in both questionnaires. Friedman test was then used to rank-order the identified contextual constraints and pressures on young learners' teachers' language choice. Finally, correlation analyses were conducted to see whether there was any significant correlation between the responses of the participants and the background information collected from them.

## **4. Results**

The data collected through the questionnaires were coded to be analyzed using the SPSS software. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were run, and the level of significance was set at 0.05 throughout the analyses. Participants' answers to the 37 items in both questionnaires were first computed according to their contribution to the ten factors identified. The computed data were then used in the final analyses. According to the coding system described above the means lower than 3 for each of the factors implied agreement with the factor statement while the means higher than 3 showed the participants' disagreement. Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the answers to the teachers' questionnaire.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of the answers to the five factors in teachers' questionnaire

Factors		Answer Range					Agreement Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree			
1. Attitudes towards teachers' L1 non-use	#	5	22	4	--	--	87	2.35	.47
	%	16.1	70.9	12.9	---	---			
2. Attitudes towards learners' L1 non-use	#	5	15	11	---	---	64.4	2.62	.66
	%	16.1	48.3	35.4	---	---			
3. Compliance with parents' ideas	#	---	14	14	3	---	45.1	2.98	.54
	%	---	45.1	45.1	9.6	---			
4. Compliance with institute principal's ideas	#	2	18	10	1	---	64.4	2.74	.59
	%	6.4	58	32.2	3.2	---			
5. Conformity to institutional rules	#	5	21	5	---	---	83.8	2.34	.57
	%	16.1	67.7	16.1	---	---			

According to the table, the means for all of the five factors were less than 3, implying the participants' general agreement with all of them. However, the third factor, that is the teachers' "compliance with parents' ideas," with a mean of 2.98 which is only slightly below the average and a total agreement percentage of 45.1, which is less than 60%, seems to be the least favored by the participants. On the other hand, the fifth factor investigating the teachers' ideas about "conformity to institutional rules" with a mean of 2.34, and a total agreement percentage of 83.8, as well as the first factor, "attitudes towards L1 non-use," with a mean of 2.35, and a total agreement percentage of 87, were the most agreed upon factors. The means and total agreement percentages of the two other factors, which respectively equaled 2.62 and 64.4 for the second factor, and 2.74 and 64.4 for the fourth factor, also indicated the teachers' agreement with them. Table 4 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the answers to the parents' questionnaire.

Table 4. Frequency distribution of the answers to the five factors in parents' questionnaire

Factors		Answer Range					Agreement Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree			
1. Attitudes towards teachers' L1 non-use	#	65	128	48	2	---	79.3	2.36	.63
	%	26.7	52.6	19.75	.8	---			
2. Attitudes towards learners' L1 non-use	#	20	102	112	9	---	50.1	2.90	.68
	%	8.2	41.9	46	3.7	---			
3. Manipulation of the teacher's practice	#	18	121	98	5	1	57.1	2.81	.62
	%	7.4	49.7	40.3	2	.4			
4. Influencing the institute principal's policies	#	34	171	36	2	---	84.2	2.44	.52
	%	13.9	70.3	14.8	.8	---			
5. Changing institutes in case of dissatisfaction	#	23	140	67	12	1	67	2.69	.69
	%	9.4	57.6	27.5	4.9	.4			

As the Table indicates, the mean for all of the five factors is less than 3, implying the participants' general agreement with them all. However, the second factor, with a mean of 2.90 which is only slightly less than the average, and a total agreement percentage of 50.1, which is less than 60%, seems to be the least favored by the participants. On the other hand, the first factor dealing with the parents' "attitudes towards teachers' L1 non-use" with a mean of 2.36, and a total agreement percentage of 79.3, as well as the fourth factor, with a mean of 2.44, and a total agreement percentage of 84.2, were the most favored. The means and total agreement percentages of the two other factors, which respectively equaled 2.51 and 57.1 for the third factor, and 2.69 and 67 for the fifth factor, also suggest the positive attitudes of young learners' parents regarding these factor statements.

#### 4.1 Research question 1

To answer the first research question, a t-test was run. Before running a t-test, however, it was also necessary to verify the normal distribution of the data in the teachers' questionnaire. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests conducted for this purpose proved the normality of the data collected in this part. In other words, since the calculated values for the first (1.09) and second (0.56) factors in the teachers' questionnaire ranged between 1.96 and -1.96, the data were normally distributed. The H0 at this point assumes that there is no significant difference between the calculated means and the average (3). To testify the null hypothesis, one-sample t-test is now conducted. Table 5 shows the results of one-sample t-tests for the first two factors.

Table 5. One sample t-test for the factors 1 and 2 in the teacher' questionnaire

Factors	Number	Mean	SD	df	T	Sig.
Attitudes towards teachers' L1 non-use	31	2.35	.47	30	-7.58	.000
Attitudes towards learners' L1 non-use	31	2.63	.66	30	-3.14	.004

The calculated means for the variables were compared to the desired means, and since the reported significance values (.000 and .004) are both less than the significance level of .05, the H0 is rejected; hence, it is concluded that the means calculated for both of the factors are significantly different from the average. In other words, it can be inferred that young learners' teachers hold significant negative attitudes towards the teachers' and learners' use of the L1 in English classes.

#### 4.2 Research question 2

The same procedure was followed for the first two factors in the parents' questionnaire to answer the second research question. The calculated values in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the two first factors in the parents' questionnaire were 1.34 and 1.18, implying the normal distribution of the data.

Using a one-sample t-test, the H0 suggests that there is no significant difference between the calculated means and the average for the first two factors in the parents' questionnaire. Table 6 depicts the one-sample t-test used to verify the null hypothesis.



Table 6. One sample t-test for the factors 1 and 2 in the parents' questionnaire

Factors	Number	Mean	SD	df	T	Sig.
Attitudes towards teachers' L1 non-use	243	2.36	.63	242	-15.6	.000
Attitudes towards learners' L1 non-use	243	2.90	.68	242	-2.2	.029

To ensure the significance of the achieved means, they were compared to the desired means, and since the reported significance values (.000 and .029) were both less than the significance level of .05, the H<sub>0</sub> is rejected. Therefore, it is concluded that the means calculated for both of the variables are significantly different from the average. In other words, the results suggest that young learners' parents hold significant negative attitudes towards the teachers' and learners' use of the L1 in English classes.

### 4.3 Research question 3

As mentioned before, the results of the descriptive analysis of young learner's parents' responses showed that they agreed with the factor statements regarding the pressures they exert on the teachers and institute officials. However, Friedman test was used to rank order these pressures, and provide an answer to research question 3. Table 7 illustrates a summary of this test (the factors are numbered according to the way they appeared in the questionnaires).

Table 7. Friedman test for factors 3, 4, and 5 in parents' questionnaire

Factors	Mean Rank
3. Manipulation of the teacher's practice	2.32
4. Influencing the institute principal's policies	1.61
5. Changing institutes in case of dissatisfaction	2.06
$\chi^2 = 68.334$	Sig.: .000

The results of Friedman Test reveal that the calculated mean rank for factor 3 (manipulation of the teacher's practice) has been 2.32, which is significantly (.000<.05) more than that estimated for the two remaining factors. In other words, the teachers seem to be on the receiving end of the greatest parental pressures.

Thus far, the results reveal that parental pressure is one of the constraints teachers face in their language choice. However, as found out in the exploratory phase, and as corroborated by the descriptive analysis of the teachers' responses the factors 3, 4, and 5 in their questionnaires, institute principals' demands and institutional rules were the two other constraining factors. So, to answer research question 3.1 and to find out which factor is the most significant, another Friedman test for the responses to factors 3, 4, and 5 in the teachers' questionnaire was run. Table 8 summarizes the results of this test (the factors are numbered according to the way they appeared in the questionnaires).

Table 8. Friedman test for factors 3, 4, and 5 in the teachers' questionnaire

Factors	Mean Rank
3. Compliance with parents' ideas	2.40
4. Compliance with institute principal's ideas	2.16
5. Conformity to institutional rules	1.44
$\chi^2 = 16.250$	Sig.: .000

According to the results of Friedman Test, the mean rank calculated for factor 3 (compliance with parents' ideas), which equaled 2.40, was significantly ( $.000 < .05$ ) higher than the mean rank of the two other variables. That is, parental pressure, in the teachers' view, is the most significant constraint they face in their decisions about language choice.

#### 4.4 Secondary findings

As mentioned before, both questionnaire sets included background information sections which covered areas such as age, degree, field of study, and years of language teaching experience for teachers; and relation to the learners, age, education level, field of study, and family income per month for parents. In order to investigate whether there was a significant correlation between the participants in each of the background information groups, and their responses to the other variables, bivariate correlation analyses were conducted among all of them. The calculations led to the identification of some correlations, of which only one was significant. Table 9 indicates the correlation between the teachers' "years of language teaching experience," and their disagreement with "compliance with parents' ideas."

Table 9. Correlation between teachers' "Years of Language Teaching Experience," and their "Compliance with Parents' Ideas"

		Correlations	
		Compliance with parents' ideas	Years of language teaching experience
Years of language teaching experience	Pearson Correlation	1	.501**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	31	31
Compliance with parents' ideas	Pearson Correlation	.501**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	31	31

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the table shows, the correlation coefficient is positive (.501), which means that more experienced teachers have disagreed (since their mean responses approached 5, which indicated disagreement in the questionnaire coding) with the idea that they are being influenced by young learners' parents. The correlation has also been, as indicated in the Table, significant at the 0.01 level.

## 5. Discussion

Despite all calls in the literature for a balanced view of L1 use, it is regarded as an uncongenial practice in many teaching contexts (Jenkins, 2010). This apparent discrepancy between theory and practice, however, does not seem to have been attended to. The primary purpose of the present study, therefore, was to investigate young learners' teachers' and parents' attitudes toward L1 use in private English language classes in an Iranian context. The attitudes which, according to Levine (2003), can be powerful tools in the investigation of L2/L1 use, as well as in designing observational and experimental research. It was also sought to identify contextual constraints on teachers' language choice with a focus on the ones imposed by young learners' parents. The logic behind such an attempt to identify contextual constraints was the findings of some previous research regarding the roles external factors can play as far as language choice decisions are concerned. The majority of the studies in this regard have been narrowly focusing on in-class decision makings, implicitly deeming teachers as the ultimate decision

makers about the L1 use issue. Nevertheless, there are some findings implying the presence of external factors and influences.

Macaro (2001), as an example, pointed out that personal beliefs and governmental policies were the two most important factors for the participants of his study to decide about the language choice. Liu et al. (2004) also found that the teachers, who were not under pressure to use the L2 maximally in their classes, were inclined to use L1 more. They also referred to national and local curricula and educational policies as other important factors. Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) similarly concluded that attitudes about L1 use depend on factors related both to the teaching context and to personal variables. They later posited that teaching context is shaped by the existing broader local policies. Such local policies could also manifest themselves in the form of departmental policies, which had previously been identified by Duff and Polio (1990) as a determining factor in teachers' use of the L1. More closely related to the focus of the present research, Nagy and Robertson (2009) also identified a similar pattern in their Hungarian context and reported that "external factors" such as "expectations in the school, the attitudes of head teachers, colleagues, parents, and the political context" (p. 85) altered teachers' decisions about language choice to a large extent. From among the five external factors identified by Nagy and Robertson, expectations of parents specifically pertains to the purpose of the present study.

However, the two studies differ from each other in that the one conducted by Nagy and Robertson dealt with public schools rather than private language institutes. This latter point could be specifically important since public schools are budgeted by the state, while private institutes depend solely on learners' parents as their financial resource. It can be concluded that institutes' financial dependence on parents, may well cause them to be more lenient to their demands and expectations.

The findings of the current study corroborate the presence of these contextual constraints on teachers' L1 use by introducing pressures exerted by young learners' parents as instances of the mentioned constraints within the research context. In essence, it is implied that young learners' parents try to reflect their negative attitudes about L1 use to teachers, and consequently sway their language choice decision in their own desired way.

Given the very fact that private language institutes in Iran survive on the budget provided by learners and their families, and do not have any other source of income apart from that, it might not be far fetched to expect these institutes' lenience towards parental requirements. In other words, private

language institute principals may have to adjust their policies to parental expectations so as to maintain their financial support. In a broader sense, pressures as such are exerted to teachers either implicitly or explicitly too. This latter point is also confirmed by the findings of the present study, since the teachers showed significant inclination to adhere to parental expectations and institutional rules.

Teachers' compliance with parental expectations, however, varies according to their age and years of language teaching experience. In other words, not all teachers report the same levels of adherence to learners' parents' requirements. As the results of the correlation analysis in this study reveal, the less experienced the teachers are, the more they are significantly influenced by the learners' parents. Moreover, 87% of the participants in this study were novice teachers with four or less years of language teaching experience, which may imply that a great proportion of the teachers teaching young learners are considerably influenced by parental expectations. The reasons for this may be twofold.

Less experienced teachers, who are in the initial years of their teaching career, may not have still developed internal criteria for different aspects of their teaching practice. They may be highly vulnerable to external forces and demands. In later years of language teaching; however, teachers may have established more fixed attitudes, attending less to the external expectations. Less experienced teachers may also be inclined to conform to institutional norms and comply with institute principals' ideas, since as the results of the interviews with institute principles suggest, they are constantly under the shadow of threats posed by institute principals to be dismissed. As Borg's (2003) model of teacher cognition suggests, constraints and threats as such may then be able to explain many discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices, which of course have not been observed in the present study. At this point, it should of course be noted that delving deep into the reasons teachers may have behind their attitudes has been beyond the scope of the present research.

Another interesting finding regarding how parents reflect their negative attitudes to the institutes is that they prefer to talk directly to the teachers rather than asking the institute principal to make changes. This can be explained in two ways. The majority of teachers teaching young learners' in this study (87%) were novice ones, and it is possible that having known this, parents may assume that changing these teachers' ideas may be much easier than the ideas of the institute principals.

The findings of this study also suggested that the participating teachers in this research held significantly negative attitudes towards L1 use both by themselves and their learners. This is in line with some other research findings in the literature, while contradicting other ones. Copland and Neokleous (2010) for instance, believe that “all teachers [in their study] were fairly unanimous in their belief that the L1 should be limited” (p. 11). Macaro (1997, in Turnbull and Arnett, 2002), however, announced that the participating teachers in her study deemed L1 exclusion impossible and unnecessary. The reasons for this seeming disparity within research findings could be manifold. Teachers participating in each of these studies have been from a variety of backgrounds. They have also been teaching in different contexts. The teachers in this study, for example, have been teaching young learners, the attitudes of whom had been investigated in no other reviewed studies. In other words, it is suggested that learners’ age and proficiency level may well influence teachers’ attitudes regarding L1 use.

## 6. Conclusion

Once thoroughly rejected, L1 use is no more considered to be inherently detrimental in second and foreign language pedagogy. Recent research in three general domains has supported the idea of giving L1 a role in language classes. Within a sociocultural framework, some researchers have counted out the potentials of L1 use by learners in collaborative tasks. Others have identified functions of L1 use by teachers, and yet others, maintaining a humanistic approach, have investigated teachers’ and learners’ attitudes towards L1 use. All in all, the three groups of studies mentioned have called for a balanced view of L1 use as opposed to the former hostility towards it. However, in many real-world teaching contexts, L1 use is still regarded as an uncongenial practice. The present research, therefore, was designed to adhere to this gap by identifying some of the contextual constraints on L1 use of the teachers teaching young learners through questionnaire data.

The results suggested that a considerable percentage of both parents (70.3%) and teachers (87%) disagreed with the teachers’ use of the first language. The results also implied their negative attitudes towards learners’ L1 use (parents 50.1 %, and teachers 64.4%). The data also revealed that young learners’ parents tend to reflect their negative attitudes about L1 use to the institutes by trying to change teachers’ practice, changing institutes in the case of dissatisfaction, and asking institute principals to change their policies about language choice. The results of Friedman test, however, suggested that trying to change teachers’ practice is the most significant

pressure the parents exert to have a say in language choice. The teachers were also found to comply with such parental expectations as well as the demands of the institute principals and institutional norms. Friedman test results for the constraints teachers face also implied that teachers are most significantly constrained by parental expectations about their language choice.

The implications offered by the findings of the present research to the realm of real world language teaching practice are twofold. First and foremost, there seems to be an urgent need to make some modifications in the way teachers are trained in the private language institutes. As the data revealed, teachers' attitudes about L1 use does not seem to be scientifically shaped. They seem to be totally unaware of the benefits of giving L1 a role in second and foreign language pedagogy.

Young learners' parents also have been found to hold significantly negative attitudes towards L1 use. Moreover they seem to reflect these attitudes to teachers, thus constraining their decisions about language choice. Therefore, it seems that there needs to be closer relationships between language institutes and learners' families. Workshops, for instance, on the benefits of L1 use in second language pedagogy could be held for young learners' parents to make them aware of benefits as such. Furthermore, as the data suggests, there seems to be no organized and systematic relationship between language institutes and learners' families. Seemingly in fact, there is no attempt to systematically connect institutes and families. Such a connection, if established, can be beneficial through enhancing the parents' knowledge of how languages are learnt, hence minimizing their constraining interventions. In short, joint collaborative endeavors involving private institute principals, supervisors, teachers, and language pedagogy experts seem to be needed to create a climate in which decisions made about language choice are scientifically oriented, free from myths and flimsy personal ideas and preferences.

The present study was limited in two general ways. First, due to small sample size generalizations are difficult to make about the findings. So, it is suggested that the study be replicated on a larger number of participants from a variety of backgrounds in different cities in Iran. Furthermore, the present study was descriptive in nature, not dealing with the reasons and roots of the participants' attitudes. Therefore, qualitative research, trying to identify why young learners' teachers and parents think about L1 use the way they do can reveal more interesting results.

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