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Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros

**The Use of Spanish in the EFL Classroom: A Case Study in a Public University**

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### Resumen

Este estudio investigó el uso del español como primera lengua en las aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera en una universidad pública al sur de Ecuador. Se examinaron los propósitos y razones de los profesores de inglés para utilizar el español. La investigación, de diseño cuantitativo descriptivo, incluyó una encuesta a 13 profesores de inglés de los niveles A1 y A2 del Instituto de Idiomas de la universidad. Los resultados revelaron que los profesores utilizaban el español principalmente para aclarar conceptos gramaticales complejos y traducir vocabulario difícil. Mientras que algunos profesores piensan que el uso del español mejoraba la comprensión de los alumnos de niveles inferiores, otros creen que su uso excesivo podía obstaculizar la inmersión en inglés y el desarrollo de la competencia lingüística. Los profesores informaron que empleaban estrategias como fomentar el uso del inglés, proporcionar imágenes y utilizar el español selectivamente para minimizar su uso excesivo. La mayoría de los profesores se mostraron dispuestos a participar en actividades de desarrollo profesional sobre la integración juiciosa de la L1 para apoyar el aprendizaje sin depender excesivamente de ella. Los resultados destacan la necesidad de un enfoque equilibrado y contextualizado del uso de la L1, permitiendo a los profesores aprovechar la L1 como herramienta de andamiaje al tiempo que promueven la máxima práctica en la lengua meta. Además, subrayan la importancia de comprender el papel de la lengua materna en la adquisición de una segunda lengua y aportan ideas para mejorar eficazmente la enseñanza del inglés.

*Palabras clave del autor:* Transferencia lingüística, herramienta de andamiaje, practicas docentes, participación estudiantil

### Abstract

This study investigated the use of Spanish as the first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at a southern public University in Ecuador. It examined English professors' purposes and reasons for using Spanish and their perception of students' attitudes. The research employed a quantitative descriptive design by administering a survey to 13 EFL professors of A1 and A2 level classes at the University's Institute of Languages. The survey data revealed that these instructors primarily used Spanish to clarify complex grammatical concepts and translate difficult vocabulary words. While some professors felt using Spanish enhanced comprehension for lower-level students, others believed overusing it could hinder students' English language immersion and proficiency development. Instructors reported using strategies like encouraging English use, providing visuals, and selectively using Spanish to minimize its overuse. Most professors expressed willingness to participate in professional development on judicious integration of L1 to support learning without excessive reliance on it. The findings highlight the need for a balanced, context-appropriate approach to L1 that enables EFL instructors to leverage L1 as a scaffolding tool while promoting maximum practice in the target language. Besides, the results emphasize the importance of understanding the role of the native language in second language teaching and provide insights to enhance English language instruction effectively.

*Author Keywords:* Language transfer, scaffolding tool, teacher practices, student engagement

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### Dedicatory

To my beloved family whose support has been extremely valuable during my study time.

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## Introduction

The role of the first language (L1) in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been an ongoing subject of inquiry and debate within the field of language education (Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Khati, 2012; Sali, 2014; Shabir, 2017). As English has gained increasing global prominence, educational institutions worldwide have prioritized developing students' communicative competence in this lingua franca. However, the extent to which the L1 should be incorporated or excluded from the language classroom remains a contentious issue (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Shabir, 2017). Proponents of an English-only approach argue that maximizing target language exposure and immersion is crucial for fostering authentic language acquisition and communication skills (Hanáková & Metruk, 2017; Iversen, 2017). On the other hand, advocates for judicious L1 use argue that intentionally drawing on students' language repertoires can scaffold comprehension, remove affective obstacles, and speed up the learning process (Bhooth et al., 2014; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014).

Within the Ecuadorian educational landscape, where English instruction has been prioritized in recent curriculum reforms, there is a necessity to understand the dynamics surrounding L1 use in EFL classrooms (Soto & Espinosa, 2015). As Donoso (2020) highlighted, evaluating language policies and teacher practices in Latin American contexts is vital to benefit future generations of language learners. However, limited empirical research has explored this phenomenon specifically within Ecuadorian EFL settings. Therefore, the present study aims to contribute insights into this understudied context by investigating the English teachers' purposes and reasons for using Spanish in the English classroom.

To address these inquiries, the thesis is structured as follows, Chapter 1 provides background information on the study, outlining the problem statement, rationale, research questions, and objectives that guided the investigation. Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework by examining relevant concepts and theories of using L1 in EFL classrooms, language transfer principles, and the conceptualization of L1 as a scaffolding tool. Additionally, it reviews prior studies exploring teachers' purposes and reasons for L1 use, as well as students' perceptions of this practice. Besides, chapter 3 delineates the quantitative descriptive methodology employed, detailing the participants, context, research instrument, ethical considerations, and approaches to data analysis. Referring to chapter 4 presents and discusses the study's findings, synthesizing the quantitative data obtained through teacher surveys and analyzing its implications concerning the research questions and existing literature. Finally, the last chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the key conclusions drawn from the research, offering recommendations for EFL pedagogy and policy, and suggesting avenues for future inquiry within the Ecuadorian context and beyond.



## Chapter 1

### Background of the Study

Over the years, the English language has played an important role in education; as a result, educational authorities have decided to make an effort to improve students' academic performance by making some changes to the English National Curriculum. As cited by Muñoz et al. (2018), "In 2012, a new National English curriculum design was launched based on the Communicative-Functional Language Approach and CEFR . . . to enhance the quality of English Language learning" (p.44). That is why teachers are bound to look for several tools to help students learn, understand, and use the target language according to the National Curriculum. In our years of practicum observations and attending English classes, it seems that one of the general tools teachers use in the classroom to impart a foreign language (English) is the first language (L1), which in our case is Spanish. Several researchers argued that the use of L1 in teaching English might provide some advantages (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014; Sali, 2014), but others claimed that L1 poses disadvantages for English learners (Hanáková & Metruk, 2017; Iversen, 2017; Orfan, 2023).

Regarding the positive aspects, there are many benefits that both teachers and students may obtain by using L1 for the English teaching-learning process as it can be seen in Yildiz and Yesilyurt (2017). For example, the use of L1 can help with issues related to students' attitudes by reducing stress and making them feel less threatened when they present some difficulty producing English (Sali, 2014). By doing so, students are encouraged to keep practicing and not to feel ashamed of making mistakes. Another advantage is that L1 can be used for beginners or low-level students. When using L1 in class, students feel comfortable, especially because they are not deeply immersed in the target language, and therefore, they still need more training and practice. In support of this statement, Cole (1998) has claimed that

L1 is most useful at the beginning and low levels. If students have little or no knowledge of the target language, L1 can be used to introduce the major differences between L1 and L2 (second language), and the main grammatical characteristics of L2 that they should be aware of (par. 9).

In addition, thanks to the influence of L1 in the learning-teaching process of a foreign language, teachers can save a great deal of time since they can explain the activity or topic by getting straight to the point without having to search or adapt the language for the different levels of the students (Copland & Neokleous, 2011). Indeed, teachers can gain some time that could be used in more practical activities (Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Galali & Cinkara 2017).

In contrast to the ideas mentioned above, there are many drawbacks to employing L1 as the primary language in the classroom, according to some academics (Cole 1998; Sipra, 2007). Based on the previous studies, the aspect that stands out the most is the ineffectiveness of using L1 during speaking activities since there is no explanation for using L1. L1 should not be used when the teacher is using exercises and games for the explanation of a topic since what the teacher wants is to elicit students' participation; and in addition, the use of L1 may lead to a negative impact on their learning (Harmer, 2008). In the same way, unless the activity demands the use of L1 due to the difficulty of the instructions or the unknown content, L1 should be avoided. Cole (1988) supported that "In pronunciation drills, L1 is inappropriate except for explaining abstract vocabulary" (par.15), alluding to a characteristic that is influenced by the teachers toward students; it is the use of L1 for different purposes. When students assimilate and realize that the teachers use Spanish to teach their classes, they do not feel obligated to use the second language (L2); therefore, this may result in a negative consequence where the students do not polish their skills as well as master the language (Sipra, 2007).

Concerning all the aspects that have been mentioned, both positive and negative, it is evident that there is, and will continue to be, a debate on the part of teachers and students about whether to use or not L1 for the teaching-learning of a foreign language. Consequently, more research has to be done in the field in order to identify the most practical tools to facilitate the acquisition of L2.

### **Problem statement**

Several researchers have demonstrated that there is a tendency to use L1 in English classrooms (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Pan & Pan, 2010; Shabir, 2017) since "L1 use functions as a social tool used to serve the purpose of communication in an L2/EFL classroom" (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015, p. 68). According to Galali and Cinkara's (2017) study, there is a link between student interactions and time spent utilizing the L1. Besides, the level of interactions increases when teachers use the L1 extensively; some of the purposes imply clarifying grammatical concepts, introducing new vocabulary, and promoting social interactions with and among pupils. In their study, Sa'd and Qadermazi (2015) discovered that the majority of interviewees agreed that the use of L1, whether by learners or teachers, should be limited and kept to a minimum and that learners/teachers should only use the L1 as a last resort. Regarding this agreement, almost all participants consented that the areas of language where L1 should be used, if at all, were grammar and vocabulary.

Nevertheless, the studies above mentioned have been mainly focused on contexts related to Europe and Asia, showing there is a scarcity of and a need for studies in the Latin American

context. As Donoso (2020) mentioned, EFL teacher education and government language policies in Latin America should be evaluated in order to benefit the newest generations of language learners. Despite the wealth of research on the subject, in general, none accounts for what occurs in an Ecuadorian setting, much less about Ecuadorian English teachers and students using L1 in the classroom. Because of this, this study focuses on learning about the perspectives Ecuadorian EFL instructors may hold toward Spanish use in EFL to provide some data for future analysis in the field.

### **Rationale**

To learn what is done regarding the use of Spanish in the EFL classroom for the subject matter covered here, it would be highly interesting to do research in Ecuadorian classrooms. Because, as mentioned before, there are no studies carried out in the Ecuadorian context, gathering data that contributes to having a picture of what is happening in a known environment could be very eye-opening. Analyzing the main reasons EFL teachers have to apply Spanish in the teaching-learning process would also be revealing. All of these activities have to be carried out to exchange and debate ideas that will best help English instruction.

Furthermore, the context of the study is significant. Prior experience of the authors of this research faced in public institutions in developing countries often face challenges such as limited resources, large class sizes, and students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Understanding why teachers use their L1 can help them better manage the classroom, improve discipline, respect their students' attitudes, and acknowledge their ways of thinking (Sa'd & Qadermazi, 2015).

Moreover, this study is relevant because it will provide information on the realities of the English classrooms in Cuenca, Ecuador, specifically regarding the use of Spanish as a scaffolding tool to teach English. The findings of the study could provide English teachers with insights into the purposes, benefits, and/or drawbacks that this strategy could bring to the EFL teaching process.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the EFL professors' purposes and reasons for using Spanish in their English language instruction?
- What are the EFL professors' perceptions of students' attitudes towards using Spanish in their English classes?

### **Objectives**

#### ***General Objective***

- To explore EFL professors' motivations and intended outcomes for using Spanish in their classroom setting.

***Specific Objectives***

- To analyze the reasons and purposes of EFL professors for incorporating Spanish in their English language instruction.
- To identify EFL professors' perceptions of their students' attitudes towards using Spanish in their English classes.

## Chapter 2

### Theoretical framework

The employment of L1 in an English classroom has been considered a relevant issue to study in the educational field (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Shabir, 2017). After checking the literature, it could be said that understanding the main aspects of this topic will enable educators to comprehend the relevance of this matter in the teaching-learning process. In the same way, studies such as *The Role of the L1 as a Scaffolding Tool in the EFL Reading Classroom* (Bhooth et al., 2014), *The Use of L1 in English as a Foreign Language Classes* (Galali & Cinkara, 2017), and *Language transfer in second language acquisition* (Popa, 2016) revealed that being aware of the strengths and weaknesses of using L1 in an English classroom, identifying the meaning of language transfer, and analyzing the role of L1 as a scaffolding tool are the most salient points to address in this research.

#### The Use of L1 in an English Classroom

As Cole (1998) mentioned, the use of the L1 in an English classroom refers to the intentional inclusion of students' native language alongside the target language (TL) (in this case English), in the context of language learning and instruction. It identifies and appreciates the linguistic capabilities that learners bring to the classroom and strives to use these resources to help and enhance the language learning process (Cole, 1998).

L1 is considered a beneficial tool that teachers may strategically deploy to enhance comprehension, give explanations, clarify concepts, and answer students' questions or worries (Shabir, 2017). This view acknowledges that learners may face challenges and constraints when depending only on the Target Language (TL), particularly in the early stages of language learning. As argued by Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015), teachers provide a supportive environment in which students feel more comfortable and secure in expressing their views, ideas, and concerns by enabling the use of L1. The same authors also said that using L1 in an English classroom fosters a considerable knowledge of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and cultural subtleties. It aids students in comparing and contrasting the structures and vocabulary of their native language with those of English, resulting in a more nuanced grasp of the TL (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015). Furthermore, these authors mentioned that L1 can act as a bridge between the learners' prior knowledge and the TL, assisting them in making connections and transferring skills and information between languages.

However, as Galali and Cinkara (2017) mentioned, an over-reliance on the learner's native language can lead to dependence, which impedes the development of English language abilities. If L1 is overused or used as a crutch, learners may experience hesitation to engage in English communication and lose out on opportunities to practice and develop their language

ability (Galali & Cinkara, 2017). Besides that, learners' pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary choices might be influenced by their L1 (Orfan, 2023). Orfan (2023) also mentioned that interference and transfer difficulties might arise due to pupils unwittingly applying L1 norms and structures to English, resulting in mistakes and inaccuracies. Conclusively, overusing L1 can encourage these patterns and limit students' progress toward mastery of the TL (Pan & Pan, 2010).

### **Language transfer**

As cited by Masny et al. (1985), language transfer is the process through which learners draw on their previous linguistic information from their L1, such as grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, pragmatics, and cultural customs, and assimilate or apply it improperly or appropriately to the L2 learning setting. Likewise, the former authors mentioned that language transfer can be positive (where L1 knowledge helps L2 learning) and negative (when L1 patterns and structures impede correct L2 production or understanding). As stated by Masny et al. (1985), linguistic similarities between the L1 and L2 are related to the number of transfer effects, that is to say, languages with more likenesses in grammar, vocabulary, or phonetics may have more positive or negative transfer. Furthermore, the learner's competency level in both the L1 and L2, as well as their exposure to L2 information and chances for engagement, can all influence the degree of language transfer (Masny et al., 1985).

According to Arabski (2006), one of the most common manifestations of language transfer is the transfer of grammatical structures and syntax from the native language to the TL. Thus, this idea may lead to sentence structures that sound unnatural or grammatically incorrect since the elements or structures of the native language that students transfer do not correspond to those of the L2 as mentioned in Arabski (2006). The author also noted that negative transfer is frequently associated with error production, but there are additional ways in which a second language learner's performance can diverge from that of a native speaker. Although the result is not always wrong, as cited by Odlin (1989), it may hinder or delay the growth of the TL at specific stages of the learning process.

Furthermore, as stated by Popa (2016), positive transfer is thought to facilitate learning when L1 and the TL share the same formal elements. The TL develops more quickly as a result of this closeness in form and makes learning a second language easier. In order to compensate for L2 limitations in their learning and communication strategy, Popa (2016) discovered that students transmit comparable or identical things, as well as past knowledge that aids in the acquisition of other new knowledge. According to Odlin (1989), only by contrasting the success of groups with various native languages, the effects of positive transfer could be determined. Similarities between L1 and L2 vocabulary, for instance, can shorten the time needed to

establish strong reading comprehension; therefore, such comparisons frequently demonstrate how cross-linguistic similarities can create beneficial transfer in a variety of ways (Odlin, 1989).

The theoretical foundations of language transfer might urge educators to approach their subject matter in a sophisticated manner. By being aware of the potential challenges and opportunities that language transfer may present, teachers could develop more effective learning support approaches for pupils. They can design lessons that consider the effects of L1, using it as a starting point for acquiring L2 competency. Ultimately, the concept of language transfer in education might serve as a guiding theory that expands language acquisition comprehension and directs pedagogical practices (Popa, 2016).

### **L1 as a scaffolding tool in the language classroom**

Hammond (2001) found that

Scaffolding, as most will be aware, is placed around the outside of new buildings to allow builders access to the emerging structure as it rises from the ground. Once the building is able to support itself, the builder removes the scaffolding. The metaphor of scaffolding has been widely used in recent years to argue that, in the same way, that builders provide essential but temporary support, teachers need to provide temporary supporting structures that will assist learners to develop new understandings, new concepts, and new abilities. As the learner develops control of these, so teachers need to withdraw that support, only to provide further support for extended or new tasks, understandings, and concepts (pp. 13-14).

As can be seen from the above quote, the term scaffolding might be ingrained in teachers. It could be said that the different aptitudes and skills that a teacher possesses at the moment of teaching have some impact on student's abilities. Besides, teachers could assist students by using L1 to enable them to achieve their academic goals as well as understand some topics that they might not be able to appreciate on their own. According to Hammond (2001), the term scaffolding has been adopted to describe the short-term support that teachers give to their pupils in order to help them finish work or gain new knowledge so that they may subsequently do similar activities on their own.

In addition, L1 could be seen as a valuable scaffolding tool in language learning, and after revising the literature it could be also used as a pedagogical mechanism by the teacher to boost language acquisition and experience. When used strategically, it could help bridge the gap between familiar concepts and new language skills, contributing to learners with the support they need to grasp complex ideas and facilitate a smoother transition to L2 proficiency (Bhooth et al., 2014). However, it is crucial to strike a balance and employ L1 judiciously, as



overreliance may hinder language development (Sali, 2014). Ultimately, the prudent integration of L1 as a scaffolding tool may enhance the language learning experience and may promote more effective communication and comprehension in the TL (Galali and Cinkara, 2017).

In conclusion, it has been determined that studying the use of L1 in an English classroom is a pertinent topic in the field of education. The principal facets of this subject analyzed above strengthen its significance in the process of teaching and learning. That is, knowing the benefits and drawbacks of the employment of L1 in an English classroom serves as a guide to identify when it is appropriate to use it or not. Similarly, based on the principles of the language, language transfer could facilitate the learning process and become a disadvantage as well. Finally, using the previous knowledge to construct new information is fully related to L1 as a scaffolding tool to reach the desired TL.

### **Literature Review**

Some studies have explored the dynamics of L1 use in English language classrooms, understanding the complexity of teachers' perspectives. The findings from the different research conducted by Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015); Copland and Neokleous (2011); Galali and Cinkara (2017); Khati (2012); Mohebbi and Alavi (2014); Orfan (2023); Sa'd and Qadermazi (2015); Sali (2014); Shabir (2017); and Wong (2020) revealed a consistent demand from students for the incorporation of L1, especially when it comes to comprehending grammar rules, receiving instructions for class activities, and navigating new vocabulary. Likewise, Galali and Cinkara (2017) and Sali (2014) claimed that teachers, in alignment with these expectations, often express a willingness to use L1 judiciously, acknowledging its efficacy in facilitating specific aspects of language learning. However, there is a discernible difference in the field of vocabulary instruction, where students express a preference for L1 use, while educators tend to use the TL (Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Sali, 2014). The same authors concluded that the minor details of this interaction stand out the intricate dynamics surrounding L1 incorporation in language classrooms and highlighted the need for a balanced approach that considers both student preferences and pedagogical strategies.

In parallel, examining the complex field of language instruction, a comparative analysis of several distinct studies executed by Galali and Cinkara (2017), Khati (2012), Shabir (2017), and Wong (2020) pointed out the diverse functions of the first language in English language classrooms. While students are more likely for L1 usage in reading and learning vocabulary, teachers take a more cautious approach before using L1 for teaching. One example of this appears in Shabir (2017), who found in his study that teachers, who use L1 judiciously, express concerns regarding the potential negative consequences of extensive L1 use,



emphasizing the adverse effects on student performance, the inhibition of thinking in English, and the reduction in effort to comprehend content in the TL. In addition, the divergence between student expectations and teachers' beliefs is particularly evident in areas such as the translation of texts and the use of L1 as the primary medium of communication since teachers do not want their students to translate text into L1 for its comprehension of the text as Shabir (2017) found in his research.

### **English teachers' purposes and reasons for using L1 in the classroom**

Hanáková and Metruk (2017); Salmona Madriñan (2014); Yildiz and Yesilyurt (2016) studies found that teachers have several common purposes and reasons for using L1 in the L2 classroom. These include breaking down difficult grammar ideas, clarifying the definitions of unfamiliar vocabulary words, providing directions for class activities, assessing students' comprehension, fostering a more relaxed learning atmosphere, developing rapport with students, talking about teaching strategies and activity planning, and supporting classroom management and discipline. According to the studies, students can improve their comprehension, reduce their anxiety, become more involved and engaged, and eventually promote their acquisition of L2 by using L1 sparingly and wisely. Overuse of L1, however, is discouraged since it deters students from practicing and being exposed to L2.

Even while the studies discovered a lot of similarities in the reasons why teachers used L1, several differences also surfaced. According to Hanáková and Metruk's (2017) study, teachers mentioned time saving and organization as the two main justifications for L1 use. The study by Salmona Madriñan (2014) highlighted the importance of teachers using L1 to impart concepts, give lesson purpose, and boost self-esteem. Yildiz and Yeşilyurt (2016), meanwhile, found that teachers' use of L1 was driven by two different motivations, talking about testing requirements and accommodating students with less English proficiency. Furthermore, L1 may enhance understanding in beginning literacy training, according to Salmona Madriñan's (2014) findings, and L1 usage may be encouraged by test expectations and grammar-based teaching choices, as stated by Yildiz and Yeşilyurt (2016). Therefore, even though the goals were generally similar, the research's attention to detail and context about L1 use differed.

### **Teachers' perceptions of their students' attitude towards using L1 in the English language class**

Multiple studies including Alsied (2018), Hashemi and Sabet (2013), Kocaman and Aslan (2018), Nursanti (2016), and Sibarani (2019) have found that teachers observe students generally harbor positive perceptions towards the integration of L1 in their English classrooms. Students view their native language as a facilitating instrument that bolsters their

comprehension of elaborate concepts, grammatical rules, and lexical meanings as elucidated by the instructor (Nursanti, 2016; Sibarani, 2019).

The aforementioned studies revealed that students expressed affirmative perceptions of the teacher's bilingual instructional approach. Additionally, an intriguing finding discovered by Sibarani (2019) denotes that higher English proficiency leads to a greater preference for TL use. The studies recognize that teachers perceive students with lower English proficiency derive more benefit from L1 integration as it facilitates understanding and communication. Overall, the findings of these studies exhibit alignment in a constructive manner, whereby students demonstrated acceptance of the bilingual approach and the calibration of L1 employment based on students' actual English language competence.

To sum up, the information covered here highlights the dynamics surrounding the incorporation of students' native language in English language classrooms. It emphasizes the interaction between teachers and students and their perspectives on this matter. Various researchers consistently emphasize students' desire to use their L1 especially when it comes to understanding grammar rules, receiving instructions, and dealing with vocabulary (Wangdi & Shimray, 2022). On the other hand, teachers are willing to use L1 selectively acknowledging its effectiveness in language learning (Salmona Madriñan, 2014). However, educators believe that the incorporation of L1 varies depending on the students' language proficiency (Algazo, 2022). This discrepancy emphasizes the necessity of a strategy that considers educational tactics as well as students' preference.

### Chapter 3

#### Methodology

According to Siedlecki (2020), “The purpose of descriptive studies is to describe individuals, events, or conditions by studying them as they are in nature. The researcher does not manipulate any of the variables but rather only describes the sample and/or the variables” (p. 8). In this sense, the main purpose of this study is to identify the English teachers’ purposes for using Spanish in the EFL classroom. Hence, a descriptive design was practical to analyze what was happening at the Institute of Languages of a public University of Cuenca in terms of the opinions of teachers regarding the use of Spanish in the classroom.

In order to systematically examine the frequency and usage of patterns of Spanish in EFL classroom settings, a quantitative approach was chosen since “quantitative methods are particularly strong at attaining deep and detailed understanding about a specific group or sample, but at the expense of generalizability.” (Swanson & Holton, 2009, p.30). Furthermore, providing findings that are communicated through descriptive statistics and numbers contributes to yielding reliable data for the context under investigation (Goertzen, 2017).

#### Participants and Context

The research was conducted at the Institute of Languages of the University of Cuenca, a public institution that offers students free English courses since they need to have a certain proficiency level in English to graduate. Therefore, the study was carried out on the Academic Foreign Language Proficiency Program [Programa Académico de Suficiencia en Lengua Extranjera (PASLE)] teachers.

The coordinator of the PASLE courses provided an original participant pool that consisted of a cohort of 25 English language instructors. Hence, the investigation focused on a subset of 13 respondents who consented to complete the survey instrument created specifically for this study. The participants were required to reply to survey questions that were specially designed to address the study's theme domain.

The participants were predominantly women (85%) and men (15%) who were instructing students at the A1 and A2 proficiency levels. Their ages ranged from 20-30 years (15%), 31-40 years (31%), 41-50 years(15%), and 51-60 years (38%). The educational background of the majority revealed possession of a master's degree (85%), whereas the remainder indicated attainment of a bachelor's degree (15%). The instructors received explanations about the purpose and scope of the study, along with an offer to participate.

| Variable           | Value    | Frequency(n) | Percentage(%) |
|--------------------|----------|--------------|---------------|
| <i>Gender</i>      | Female   | 11           | 85%           |
|                    | Male     | 2            | 15%           |
| <i>Instruction</i> | Bachelor | 2            | 15%           |
|                    | Master   | 11           | 85%           |
| <i>Age</i>         | 20-30    | 2            | 15%           |
|                    | 31-40    | 4            | 31%           |
|                    | 41-50    | 2            | 15%           |
|                    | 51-60    | 5            | 38%           |

An online questionnaire was carried out voluntarily; therefore, different deadlines were given for its completion. A two-month deadline was given to instructors in order to answer the instrument. In the first deadline, only a few teachers responded, so a new deadline was set for more EFL teachers to contribute with their answers. At the end of this second deadline, more responses were obtained, but not from all teachers as expected at the beginning of the study. As there were different deadlines and as it was a voluntary questionnaire, it was understood that there would be no more participants and the survey was closed.

### **Instrument**

Surveys are a widely used research tool that allows researchers to collect data on a range of topics. According to Stern et al. (2014), surveys are particularly useful for gathering quantitative data on attitudes, behaviors, and opinions from a sample of participants. Surveys can be administered in a variety of formats, including online, by phone, or in person, and can be used to collect data from diverse populations. As a result, distributing the survey to educators from the Institute of Languages of the University aided in demonstrating how they feel about using Spanish in the classroom, their purposes and reason for doing so. Moreover, the use of this tool made it easier to gather, examine, and evaluate the project's outcomes.

In constructing the survey questionnaire, great care and attention were given to drawing inspiration from a comprehensive review of pertinent literature. Through an in-depth analysis of a particular article (Orfan, 2023), the questions were thoughtfully developed to align with

the research objectives and the wider educational landscape. As a result, the survey covered a diverse range of topics, delving into the experiences, perspectives, and practices of teachers in the use of L1 while teaching English. Before being distributed, the instrument went through pertinent validation by an English teacher, who meticulously reviewed it and offered insightful comments and advice to improve its effectiveness. Once these suggestions were incorporated, the survey underwent one more round of revisions and validation to be disseminated.

Following that, the first part of the survey asked 3 demographic questions such as the age of the participants, their gender, as well as their level of education in the field of teaching. The second part was divided into 10 questions that focused on the teachers' perspectives on the use of L1 in their English classes. These questions were formulated as Likert-scale questions, in which one of them had four alternatives to choose from while the others had five options, as suggested by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The data-gathering process employed in this study strictly followed an informed consent protocol to uphold ethical standards and participants' rights (Joffe et al., 2001). Thus, the director of the Institute of Languages of the University received a carefully prepared informed consent form on paper that outlined all necessary details related to the research. After the documentation was approved by the director, a roster listing the potential participants was distributed, which allowed the study project to proceed effectively. At the beginning of the survey, there was an explanation about how the survey worked as well as letting participants know they had the right to participate in it or not. This procedure emphasized the value of ethical transparency and well-informed decision-making, building mutual respect and confidence between participants and researchers throughout the data collection process (Faden & Beauchamp, 1986).

### **Data Analysis**

Regarding the analysis of quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used as they are an essential tool for summarizing and analyzing data in quantitative research. These statistical techniques enable researchers to explore the characteristics of a sample or population, providing valuable insights into patterns and trends (Kaur et al., 2018). In addition, descriptive statistics can also be used to assess relationships between variables and to identify outliers or anomalies in the data. As noted by Kaur et al. (2018), descriptive statistics play a crucial role in summarizing data in an orderly way and describing the relationship between variables in a sample or population. Afterward, the survey results are presented visually through the use

of tables to better illustrate the data obtained about teachers' purposes for using Spanish in the English classroom.

## Chapter 4

## Results and Discussion

The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics which are represented by the use of tables to support the analysis of the information provided by the teachers.

Table 1 determines the regularity of the use of the teachers' mother tongue with the students in the English classroom.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of the use of L1 in the English classroom*

|               | (f) | (%)  |
|---------------|-----|------|
| Never         | 0   | 0    |
| Almost never  | 5   | 38,5 |
| Sometimes     | 8   | 61,5 |
| Almost always | 0   | 0    |
| Always        | 0   | 0    |
| Total         | 13  | 100  |

*Note.* Data shows teachers' frequency of Spanish usage in A1-A2 levels.

Data collected in this study demonstrates that five professors (38,5% of the sample) almost never used Spanish in their classes. As it was asserted in the practicum at the university, this scenario could arise because educators view students' overuse of the L1 as detrimental to their language development, exposure to other languages, and dependence on their mother tongue, among other issues. Additionally, they may want their students to begin constructively using their language skills. This idea is supported by Yıldız and Yeşilyurt (2016) outcomes, which mentioned that a great percentage of the participants were not in favor of the use of the L1 because it mainly decreases the amount of exposure to the target language (English) and restricts the opportunity to practice.

Moreover, data revealed that eight professors (61,5%) answered that they used Spanish sometimes in the classroom. This frequency may occur because according to several studies (Algazo, 2022; Hashemi, & Sabet, 2013; Khati, 2012; Wong, 2020; and Yıldız & Yeşilyurt, 2016), there are numerous benefits to implementing the L1 in the classroom, including rapport-building, teaching new vocabulary, clarifying complex material, and providing instructions. In line with these findings, data collected by Khati (2012), Wong (2020), Yıldız and Yeşilyurt (2016) established that teachers are accustomed to constantly using their L1 in their classes, and the reasons for a higher percentage of usage that stand out the most are for giving

instructions, explaining difficult concepts, and usage of new vocabulary. One important reason why teachers mentioned L1 is commonly used in the study by Khati (2012) is that learners from government-aided schools with low socioeconomic backgrounds feel a greater need for L1.

Table 2 reveals data on the primary reason for using the mother tongue in English classes.

**Table 2**

*Reasons for using L1 in English classes*

| Reasons                              | (f) | (%)  |
|--------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Clarification of complex concepts    | 11  | 84,6 |
| Translation of difficult vocabulary  | 4   | 30,8 |
| Classroom management and discipline  | 1   | 7,7  |
| Connecting with students emotionally | 2   | 15,4 |
| Other                                | 0   | 0    |

*Note.* Data was gathered to know the teachers' reasons for using the L1 in the English classroom.

Regarding the answers provided for question two, in which instructors could select more than one reason to use their mother tongue in English classes, the data reveals that instructors use their mother tongue primarily to clarify complex concepts (84,6%). This issue may arise due to the differences between Spanish and English and the necessity of understanding ideas, concepts, and even grammar that differ from that of one's native tongue. In other words, when learning a language becomes complex, L1 may aid in pupils' comprehension. These findings are in parallel with those of the research by Hashemi and Sabet (2013), Orfan (2023), and Shabir (2017) who reported that L1 is highly frequently used for explaining complicated grammatical points, new vocabulary, and clarifying difficult concepts since students tend to understand more if the explanations are in the mother tongue.

Regarding the second statement "translation of difficult vocabulary" (30,8% of the sample), the data shows that these university teachers use it as a second option for the implementation of L1 in their classes, as opposed to other studies such as Alsied (2015) and Borzogian and Fallahpour (2015) which indicated that teachers mostly utilize L1 for translation rather than clarification. Since the contexts of the studies are Arabic (Alsied, 2015) and Persian (Borzogian & Fallahpour, 2015), instructors may employ the L1 mostly when translating complicated vocabulary for pupils who experience trouble with difficult topics because



Arabic/Persian differs from Spanish. Thus, Spanish speakers may not encounter such challenges initially, as Spanish and English share similarities that facilitate comprehension.

Additionally, few teachers use the L1 to connect with students emotionally (15,4%), and only one instructor for classroom management and discipline (7,7%). It could happen because some teachers believe they can manage classroom discipline and foster student relationships using only the L2, negating the necessity to employ the L1. However, Hashemi and Sabet (2013) found that teachers used the L1 extensively for discipline and classroom management, particularly when clarifying instructions for in-class activities. Mohebbi and Alavi (2014) found that teachers use the L1 to establish rapport with students as well as for discipline and classroom management.

Table 3 discloses instructors' opinions regarding the enhancement of students' understanding of English concepts through the use of the L1 in the English classroom.

**Table 3**

*Professors' perception of students' understanding of English concepts through the use of their L1*

|              | (f) | (%)  |
|--------------|-----|------|
| Not at all   | 0   | 0    |
| Slightly     | 1   | 7,7  |
| Moderately   | 9   | 69,2 |
| Very much    | 2   | 23,1 |
| I'm not sure | 0   | 0    |
| Total        | 13  | 100  |

*Note.* Data was collected to know to what extent teachers believe Spanish enhances learning English.

According to data from this survey, teachers perceive the use of the mother tongue enhances students' understanding of English concepts both moderately (69,2%) and very much (23,1%) within the English classroom. This kind of circumstance could arise when A1–A2 pupils need explanations and clarifications of the English language in Spanish in order to make concepts and information understandable and meaningful. The results of this study seem to agree with Wong's (2020) research in which the author found using L1 bottom-up language-focused teaching techniques helped to make sure they comprehend more in a faster manner. It also matches the outcomes Shabir (2017) obtained to demonstrate teachers use L1 because

students like using English for explaining simple grammatical terms and concepts and L1 for more difficult terms and concepts.

Similarly, Orfan (2023) and Yıldız and Yeşilyurt (2016) reported teachers sometimes prefer to use the L1 to explain new words, give instructions, explain grammar, and check for understanding, among others since, for example, educators must assess whether pupils comprehend that doing so may make them feel more comfortable expressing themselves.

On the opposite, only one participant answered slightly to this survey question. This may indicate that the instructor believes that utilizing Spanish hinders students' ability to enhance their English language skills and discourages them from using their second language for self-expression. In this sense, Yıldız and Yeşilyurt (2016) also discovered that according to several participants, using L1 not only eliminates the chance for practice but also impairs one's ability to think and talk in the target language. They are unable to get better at speaking English in L2 lessons as long as they are speaking Turkish instead of English.

Table 4 shows data related to the teachers' perceptions regarding students asking questions in Spanish instead of English.

**Table 4**

*Professors' perceptions towards the use of Spanish by their students for asking questions*

|                    | (f) | (%)  |
|--------------------|-----|------|
| Very uncomfortable | 0   | 0    |
| Uncomfortable      | 2   | 15,4 |
| Neutral            | 10  | 76,9 |
| Comfortable        | 1   | 7,7  |
| Very Comfortable   | 0   | 0    |
| Total              | 13  | 100  |

*Note.* Data was gathered to know the professors' perceptions of their students' use of Spanish to ask questions

Table 4 shows that 10 professors (76,9% of the sample) remain neutral in terms of how they feel about their students' use of Spanish to ask questions instead of English; additionally, 2 professors, which corresponds to 15,4% of the sample, are uncomfortable for the same statement. Finally, only one participant (7,7%) indicated that was comfortable with the statement.

Data shows that almost all the professors remain neutral stance in their perception of the use of Spanish in students for asking questions; therefore, it can be noticed that they are neither uncomfortable nor comfortable. Furthermore, thanks to this table, it can be said that for the most part, professors do not feel that the use of Spanish in English classes explicitly harms language learning. Hanakova and Metruk, (2017) also evidenced that the use of the L1 can be employed positively without compromising English proficiency.

In addition, it may be that most of the professors remain neutral in their response due to the level of the students, since the professors who are the participants of this study teach A1 and A2 levels, in which the students have little exposure to the language and hence the use of Spanish by the students would serve as a tool to save time in class or to clarify doubts that they do not know how to express in English; this is similar to the data obtained in the research of Hanakova and Metruk, (2017).

Regarding the information from above, it is also aligned with the following findings, where “the students used L1 for asking (11%) and answering (7%) questions and clarifying the ambiguities (5%)” (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015, p. 78). It can be seen that L1 does help students for acquiring new knowledge.

Finally, Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015); and Hanakova and Metruk (2017) claimed that teaching English in foreign language environments necessitates increased L1 use to save time, clarify confusion, provide instruction, aiming to highlight the contrasts between specific parts, such as grammar errors, and manage classrooms with lower skill levels. That is why L1 can help teachers and students achieve their goals in the classroom by serving as a support tool.

Next, table 5 provides information about professors' thoughts on whether the use of Spanish hinders students' language immersion in English.

**Table 5**

*Professors' perspectives on how using Spanish might impact students' English language immersion*

|                   | (f) | (%)  |
|-------------------|-----|------|
| Strongly disagree | 0   | 0    |
| Disagree          | 3   | 23,1 |
| Neutral           | 5   | 38,5 |
| Agree             | 4   | 30,8 |
| Strongly agree    | 1   | 7,7  |

---

|       |    |     |
|-------|----|-----|
| Total | 13 | 100 |
|-------|----|-----|

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*Note.* Data was gathered to see professors' thoughts on whether the use of Spanish hinders students' language immersion in English.

Table 5 reveals that five teachers (38,5%) stay neutral about the students' immersion in English; besides, four teachers agree with the same statement; understanding that they believe that the use of Spanish hinders students' English language immersion. Additionally, one teacher strongly agrees with the negative impact of Spanish. Finally, and on the other hand, three teachers disagree on Spanish negative impact.

Data reveals a division in terms of professors' opinions and thoughts relying upon the use of Spanish in the context of students' immersion in the language. By this, it is possible to say that based on how much Spanish is used, the effectiveness of English language immersion programs can vary depending on the perspectives of educators. This diversity, in viewpoints raises questions about striking a balance between creating a supportive language learning environment and addressing challenges related to students' use of their native language. It leads to an examination of the factors influencing teachers differing opinions, such as teaching philosophies, cultural aspects, and personal experiences.

Following the negative aspects that some professors stated in this research, it matches with the findings that were collected in the study of Galali and Cinkara, (2017) who reported that L1 interrupts their focus in English classes as using the L1 with the TL was awkward and inappropriate. Copland and Neokleous, (2011) found in their research similar oppositions on the part of teachers at the moment of using L1; they noted that "all teachers were fairly unanimous in their belief that the L1 should be limited, which in some cases contradicted their practices" (Copland & Neokleous, 2011, p. 278), teachers, despite expressing concerns about native language impact, still use it in classes, suggesting research responses may not entirely reflect their practices.

On the other hand, in a different article carried out by Sali (2014), the three participants remained positive about L1 use in English classes stating that "their primary reason for using L1 was again to provide better learner comprehension and to help learners complete tasks successfully" (p.316). It can be aligned with the responses collected in this study due to the language proficiency level of students. Besides, the findings match the statement of the present study in the sense that some professors disagree that L1 hinders students' immersion in English.

Table 6 determines the professors' strategies to minimize the use of Spanish in their classrooms.

**Table 6***Professors' strategies to minimize Spanish*

|                                                       | (f) | (%)  |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Encourage students to ask questions in English        | 8   | 61,5 |
| Provide bilingual glossaries for difficult vocabulary | 3   | 23,1 |
| Use visuals and realia to explain concepts            | 9   | 69,2 |
| Conduct lessons entirely in English                   | 4   | 30,8 |
| Other                                                 | 1   | 7,7  |

*Note.* Professors were allowed to choose more than one option.

Table 6 shows that nine answers were given for using visual and realia to explain concepts, representing 69,2%. Eight answers follow it in encouraging students to ask questions in English (61,5%). Meanwhile, the others were not quite frequently used as expected.

Data gathered in this study demonstrates that two statements stand out the most in this research for strategies used to minimize the use of Spanish in classrooms. These statements are related to the use of visuals and realia to explain concepts, trying to avoid as much as possible Spanish, and encouraging students to participate actively by asking questions in the target language. The same findings of the former were collected in Algazo, (2022), where some teachers stated that in order to avoid overusing the native language, realia and visuals were part of their classes; emphasizing the reading lessons where students struggled the most. These results might be aligned with the present study because the research was conducted in a public educational institution, the same as the University where this survey took place.

Similar results were obtained from the study of Sa'd and Qadermazi, (2015) in which students made use of the TL because of a policy imposed by the teacher in charge, in which the aim was to practice English all the time inside the classroom. Regarding the latter, the information collected by Hashemi and Sabet (2013) mentioned that most teachers motivate their students to use the target language through different techniques such as encouraging, drawing, acting, demonstrating, and more. Even the students showed their negativity to the use of the native language to learn English:

I do not have a strong belief in L1 use. I think teachers should try not to use it in the classroom because the classroom environment is the only place for the students to be exposed to the target language; rather, the teachers should point out the target

language's importance and motivate the students to use it in the classroom (Hashemi & Sabet, 2013, p. 149).

Overall, the converging evidence from these studies in conjunction with the data collected in this study may be similar because of the language proficiency level of the students. Also, it underscores the importance of pedagogical approaches focused on minimizing the use of the native language and encouraging ongoing engagement with the target language to improve language acquisition and proficiency.

Table 7 reveals data about how professors handle situations where students struggle to understand English.

**Table 7**

*Handling situations where students struggle to understand English instructions or concepts*

|                                                           | (f) | (%)  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Repeat instructions in both English and the mother tongue | 6   | 46,2 |
| Provide additional examples and explanations in English   | 8   | 61,5 |
| Use gestures and body language to convey meaning          | 9   | 69,2 |
| Encourage peer assistance and collaboration               | 1   | 7,7  |
| Other                                                     | 0   | 0    |

*Note.* Professors were allowed to choose more than one option.

Table 7 indicates that there is (69,2%) favorability in professors to use gestures and body language to convey meaning when students are confused. Some others (61,5%) prefer to provide additional examples and explanations. Meanwhile, some participants (46,2%) prefer to repeat the instructions, and finally, a very small number (7,7%) tries to encourage peer assistance and collaboration.

Although in this research the option with the most responses was the use of gestures and body language, not much information about this option could be found in the literature, the reasons might be due to the demographic context in which the studies were conducted. However, Salmona Madriñan's (2014) study concluded that body language is of vital importance to be able to acquire a second language, especially in reading activities since it ensures understanding by the students. The results may be on par with those in this research because data was gathered in a Latin-American context, more specifically in Colombia which is a neighboring country.

Newly, there was not much information regarding the statement of providing additional examples and explanations in English, and it could be associated with the demographic context as well as the language level proficiency in which the different articles were conducted. However, in Alsied's (2018) study, some teachers were found to provide extra explanations when students seemed to be confused or did not understand the topic at all.

On the contrary, one of the options that did not receive as many responses was one of the most frequently mentioned in various articles. Teachers in this research seem not to make constant use of repeating instructions in both languages, but it can be observed in some articles (Alsied, 2018; Kocaman & Aslan, 2018; Sibarani, 2019) that repeating instructions in class is critical to improving student performance because it promotes solid understanding of activities and reduces the chance of time wasted.

This practice not only ensures that pupils can successfully finish their provided duties, but it also helps with general academic development, so when instructions are unclear or not repeated, students may grow prone to ignoring duties and shifting their attention to other activities (Alsied, 2018; Kocaman & Aslan, 2018; Sibarani, 2019). Therefore, in conjunction with this research, it can be said that systematic repetition of instructions could arise as a valuable strategy to foster a more productive and focused learning environment.

The table that follows displays the willingness of educators to fully engage in chances for professional development related to L1 reduction in the classroom.

**Table 8**

*Professors' willingness to participate in reducing L1 in the classroom*

|                | (f) | (%)  |
|----------------|-----|------|
| Definitely yes | 7   | 53,8 |
| Yes            | 3   | 23,1 |
| Neutral        | 2   | 15,4 |
| No             | 1   | 7,7  |
| Definitely no  | 0   | 0    |
| Total          | 13  | 100  |

*Note.* Data gathered to know if professors are willing to reduce the amount of Spanish in the classroom.

The outcomes of this study demonstrate that professors have a significant desire to participate in activities that support their professional development, concerning the reduction of the L1

within English classrooms. Notably, 53,8% of the sample population categorically supported this initiative, and 23,1% expressed affirmative inclination towards such opportunities. The observed phenomenon could be explained by a deliberate attempt to improve the language proficiency of the students by promoting language immersion and skill development through the fullest use of the L2 because students should expect a different experience at the university level. Specifically, they should encounter a maximum use of English in General English classes, as teachers serve as role models and can encourage students to use English.

This viewpoint is consistent with research by Alsied (2018) who found that students who use the L1 (Arabic) will not benefit from more exposure to English and will not be able to connect with their teacher in the classroom. Moreover, Sa'd's (2015) results showed that teachers had similar positive sentiments on reducing the use of L1 in English learning environments in order to enhance students' linguistic competences.

Conversely, 15,4% of participants expressed no opinion on reducing the use of L1 in the classroom, whereas the remaining 7,7% gave a negative response to this issue. This circumstance may have been influenced by teachers' preferences to use L1 in the classroom in accordance with students' English proficiency levels (A1–A2) since the latter may find it difficult to understand vocabulary, complex content, or grammar taught solely in L2 contexts. However, by using L1, teachers may be able to assist their students in learning L2. This perspective aligns with Algazo (2022) who found that “The teacher-participants also showed an awareness that their classrooms included students of different proficiency levels and using more L1 with low proficiency students helped to decrease the proficiency gap between students in their L2 classroom” (p. 34). Likewise, Alsied (2018) discovered teachers' concerns about the use of L1 depend on students' levels since Arabic should not be utilized at all if they are good, but due to the students' low proficiency, the teacher will need to use it to clarify certain points such as words, concepts, or terms.

The next table targets the impact on students' English proficiency development by the use of the mother tongue in the classroom.

**Table 9**

*Professors' perceptions of students' English proficiency development impacted by the use of L1*

|                       | (f) | (%)  |
|-----------------------|-----|------|
| Positively            | 2   | 15,4 |
| Negatively            | 5   | 38,5 |
| No significant impact | 2   | 15,4 |



|              |    |      |
|--------------|----|------|
| I'm not sure | 4  | 30,8 |
| Total        | 13 | 100  |

*Note.* Data gathered to identify how professors think Spanish exposure affects students' language proficiency.

Data collected shows differing perspectives on how using the L1 by professors in the classroom affects students' English proficiency outcomes. A significant percentage of respondents (38,5%) concurs that there is a negative impact, which may be mostly caused by pupils' propensity to become habituated to using L1 rather than L2 since teachers in high school might have a tendency to use Spanish when teaching English. In line with these findings, Alsied (2015) mentioned that if students are exposed to L1 (Arabic) often, it may become solidified in them and make it more difficult for them to express themselves in English, seeing the L1 as an obstacle to learning. Furthermore, as students do not have the chance to practice outside of the classroom, another reason to regard the usage of the L1 negatively could be their exposure to language, and teachers could prefer to utilize the L2 as much as possible within the classroom. Similar to this point of view, Hashemi and Sabet (2013), Orfan (2023), Shabir (2017), Wangdi and Shimray (2022), and Yıldız and Yeşilyurt (2016) revealed that since the classroom is the sole setting in which students are exposed to the target language, teachers should strive to avoid using it there. Instead, they should emphasize the value of the target language and encourage students to use it in the classroom.

This chart also shows that 30,8% of the sample said they were unsure of how the L1 will affect the L2's acquisition. This scenario can be related to the instructor's linguistic background because they may not be aware of the appropriate frequency of Spanish to employ in the classroom to support students' learning. Experience plays a crucial role in this situation, and educators will know when and how to utilize L1 (Arabic) in the right contexts because expertise can assist educators in maintaining harmony between L1 and L2 (Alsied, 2015). That is, teachers have to know where to use the first language judiciously and effectively (Hashemi & Sabet, 2013).

In reference to the positive impact of utilizing Spanish in the classroom, only 15,4% of respondents acknowledged such benefits, which runs counter to other studies wherein a great percentage of both teachers and students identify some beneficial ways to improve L2 learning through the use of the mother tongue. For instance, Kocaman and Aslan (2018) in their research found that "the majority of the students from different proficiency levels believe that the use of L1 is essential" (p. 184) which is coherent with Nursanti's (2016) research who also found students have a positive perception towards the use of bilingual language in the

classroom, and Sibarani's (2019) findings who reported that those who took part felt that using Bahasa Indonesia in their English classes was beneficial since it made it safer and simpler for them to understand complex concepts that were explained in the language.

Even though some studies have demonstrated that L1 instruction can help students become more proficient language users, educators may be unaware of this fact or consider that L1 instruction has little impact on teaching L2, as indicated by the opinions of the remaining 15,4% of the investigation's participants.

Table 10 demonstrates data related to the challenges faced when minimizing the use of the mother tongue in English classes.

**Table 10**

*Challenges faced in minimizing Spanish in English classes*

|                                               | (f) | (%)  |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Lack of resources                             | 0   | 0    |
| Student resistance                            | 4   | 30,8 |
| Time constraints                              | 3   | 23,1 |
| Limited proficiency in English among students | 10  | 76,9 |
| Other                                         | 3   | 23,1 |

*Note.* Professors were allowed to choose more than one option.

The chart shows that the challenge that is frequently faced when minimizing Spanish is limiting proficiency in English (76,9 % of the sample) followed by student resistance (30,8 %). Equal results were collected for the statements of time constraints (23,1 %) and others (23,1 %).

It can be said that based on the data obtained, teachers tend to show a negative attitude towards the mother tongue since they believe that its use limits the full development of the student's abilities to learn English. This is linked to the information that is found in the research of Yıldız and Yeşilyurt (2016), who found that L1 overuse might limit L2 development by restricting students' exposure to the second language and consequently their opportunity to practice it.

Although some teachers of the previous research mentioned that they are against the "overuse" of the L1, so as far as it is used properly, it was allowed. Thus, having a similar answer among professors about L1 limiting English students' proficiency, it may indicate that teachers are not aware of the importance that L1 can have in acquiring TL, as well as the strategies to know where it can be properly used; therefore, they prefer to avoid its use.

Moreover, Salmona Madriñan, (2014) found that some students feel more comfortable when using L1 since it allows them to reduce anxiety, stress, boredom, improve vocabulary, and a better understanding of the content. It can be aligned with this research in the sense that teachers are aware that some students feel frustrated when the whole class is given in English due to students' lack of the language. These ideas could be related to the answers obtained from this question in which teachers responded that students are likely to resist when English classes are only in the L2 since they notice students' behaviors and reactions to the L2 during their classes.

As indicated by the data, the majority of educators explain difficult ideas and give directions in their English (L2) classes using Spanish (L1). However, there were divergent opinions in their perspectives on the impact of L1 use on students' English language immersion and proficiency development. Moreover, a few educators thought that careful application may improve their students' comprehension, while others thought it could prevent them from being exposed to the language and make it more difficult for them to think and communicate in the TL. Additionally, instructors employed strategies to reduce the time students spent on L1, like pushing them to ask questions in English, using realia and pictures, and giving more examples. To lower the use of L1, most instructors indicated that they would be open to participating in professional development programs.

Finally, despite the ongoing debate surrounding the use of L1 in L2 classrooms, the study's findings highlight the necessity of a careful and contextually appropriate approach that takes into account students' proficiency levels, learning needs, and the overall pedagogical goals of language immersion and proficiency development.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

This study focused on analyzing the use of the L1 (Spanish) within the English classroom at the Language Institute of a public University of Cuenca. After gathering quantitative data, it can be concluded that most professors of A1-A2 levels use Spanish in their L2 classes because L1 aids at lower and early levels with students who know little or nothing about the target language (Cole, 1998; Shabir, 2017). This information answers the research question related to the professors' purposes and reasons for using the L1, in which most participants reported using L1 at least sometimes in their English classes, primarily for clarifying concepts and translating vocabulary, predominantly when they turn hard-to-understand. The differences between Spanish and English can make some English concepts and vocabulary quite complex for students, especially at lower proficiency levels like A1-A2.

Furthermore, concerning the second research question, the results obtained in this study showed that EFL professors' perceptions regarding their students' attitudes had mixed views on whether using L1 enhances or hinders learners' English language and proficiency development. On one hand, L1 use can improve comprehension and allow students to complete tasks when struggling with English (Pan & Pan, 2010; Sali, 2014). On the other hand, overuse of L1 could limit exposure and practice time in English, hindering proficiency development (Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Orfan, 2023; Shabir, 2017; Wangdi & Shimray, 2022). However, these contradictions seem to be due to their knowledge of how to use L1 judiciously in the class since some instructors are not sure of the impact of the usage of the mother tongue among students learning L2, which also leads to instructors not being aware of the first language usage in order to improve the teacher-student rapport, ease student anxiety, and facilitate the student-teacher relationship (Algazo, 2022; Khati, 2016; Wong, 2020; Shabir, 2017; and Yıldız & Yeşilyurt, 2012).

Regarding this thoughtful way to use L1, this research found that some teachers are willing for professional development on reducing L1 use. By knowing how and when to use it regularly, teachers might be able to develop skills to include the L1 according to the goal, topic, objective, or student level. This desire might occur because educators crave to expand students' English immersion and model more exclusive L2 use appropriate for a university context.

It is worth noting that there were certain limitations encountered during the course of this research. One significant constraint was the response rate of participants in the survey, which resulted in partial data collection and thus affected the level of generalizability of our findings. Furthermore, the environment in which the data was gathered may not fully capture the diverse

challenges faced by other public institutions like schools or high schools. These factors collectively underscore the need for cautious interpretation of the study's outcomes.

As a final point, this investigation concludes that there is a need for a balanced, context-appropriate approach to L1 use. Professors utilize Spanish in their English classes; therefore, they must know accounts for the pros and cons of L1 use and the aim to optimize its judicious use for supporting learning without over-reliance.

### **Recommendations**

This study focused on EFL professors' perceptions at a public University of Cuenca; therefore, it would be advisable to encourage the balance of L1 use in English classes and the helpful tool it can be in acquiring the target language. It is critical to emphasize to educators the significance of striking a careful balance, using L1 for activities such as clarifying complicated concepts, and providing clear directions without leaning too much on it. This could go hand in hand with using visuals to support the balanced usage of L1 in the classroom. Teachers can improve comprehension and engagement using visual aids to supplement English language education. Furthermore, providing a learning environment in which students are encouraged to ask questions and participate in conversations in English may promote active language use and reduce dependency on L1.

Besides, providing professional development opportunities for teachers and analyzing factors that influence teachers' choices involving their philosophies, experiences, and cultural aspects is critical in equipping them with the information and skills needed to effectively incorporate L1 into English language classroom setting. As has been evidenced by this study and through experience in the educational field, the premise that foreign language classes must solely and strictly be conducted in English persists. It is important to debunk this misconception that Spanish, in our context, contributes nothing, on the contrary, after analyzing several studies, it could be argued that it does have a positive impact as long as professors know how, when, and where to use it.

Educators can learn about best practices and evidence-based strategies for incorporating L1 in ways that improve language learning experiences through suited training sessions. Finally, this research was mainly focused on instructors, hence it would be recommendable to apply the study to university students to better understand their opinions about the use of Spanish, in this way achieving another perspective that will help to have a better understanding of this topic, which is of great relevance to offer a more effective and efficient education. If possible, the study could be applied in public schools where greater use of L1 in English classes could be seen. Therefore, a more complete study that will cover different areas could give more

accurate answers in order to help both educators and students to better understand the use and impact of the mother tongue in English classes.

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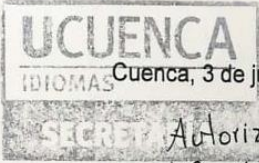
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## Annexes

## Annex A: Authorization letter

 Cuenca, 3 de julio de 2023

Lcda. María Isabel Espinoza, PhD.  
Directora del Instituto Universitario de Idiomas

*Autorizado, para  
ratificación en el próximo  
consejo coordinador.  
M. Isabel Espinoza H.  
04-JUL-2023*

De nuestra consideración,

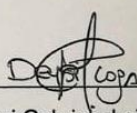
Nosotros, Jorge Eduardo Patiño Jadan, con número de cédula: 0104783543 y Deysi Gabriela Loja Minchalo, con número de cédula 0105258263, por medio de la presente, solicitamos a usted y por su intermedio al Consejo del Instituto, se nos autorice realizar nuestro trabajo de titulación con los estudiantes y docentes del Instituto Universitario de Idiomas. El proyecto propuesto tiene como objetivo conocer cuáles son las razones del docente al momento de utilizar el español en las clases de inglés, identificando además los distintos propósitos para los que emplea el español. Nuestro trabajo incluye la recolección de datos mediante una encuesta a los estudiantes y entrevistas a los docentes.

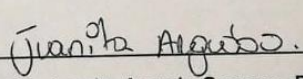
Esta investigación se llevará a cabo bajo la tutoría de la Lcda. Juanita Argudo, PhD., quien firma el documento en respaldo a la petición.

Seguros de contar con su autorización que contribuirá al desarrollo de este importante trabajo académico, le anticipamos nuestros más sinceros agradecimientos.

Atentamente,

  
Jorge Eduardo Patiño Jadan  
jorge.patinoj@ucuenca.edu.ec

  
Deysi Gabriela Loja Minchalo  
deysi.loja@ucuenca.edu.ec

  
Lcda. Juanita Argudo Serrano, PhD.  
Tutora

*Recibido*  
04/07/2023  


**Annex B: Survey Design for PASLE English's Professors****The Use of Spanish in the EFL Classroom: A Case Study in a Public University.**

Welcome to our research survey, "The Use of Spanish in the EFL Classroom: A Case Study in a Public University." We invite educators in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at the university to share their insights and experiences regarding the incorporation of Spanish in the EFL learning environment. As the global landscape emphasizes interconnectedness, understanding the dynamics of language use, particularly the role of students' native languages like Spanish, is crucial. Your valuable input will help uncover patterns, challenges, and potential benefits associated with bilingual instruction in EFL classrooms, contributing to a deeper understanding of the linguistic dynamics shaping language education. Thank you for your participation in this important study!

**Age\***

20-30

31-40

41-50

51-60

61+

**Gender**

Male

Female

Other

**Instruction**

Bachelor

Master

PHD

**1. How frequently do you use your mother tongue (native language) during English language classes?**

Never

Almost never

Sometimes

Almost Always

Always

**2. What is the primary reason for using your mother tongue in English classes?**

A. Clarification of complex concepts

B. Translation of difficult vocabulary

C. Classroom management and discipline

D. Connecting with students emotionally

E. Other

**3. To what extent do you believe the use of your mother tongue enhances students' understanding of English concepts?**

Not at all

Slightly

Moderately

Very much

I'm not sure

**4. How comfortable do you feel when students ask questions in the mother tongue instead of English?**

Very uncomfortable

Uncomfortable

Neutral

Comfortable

Very comfortable

**5. Do you think the use of the mother tongue hinders students' English language immersion?**

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

**6. What strategies do you employ to minimize the use of your mother tongue in the classroom?**

- A. Encourage students to ask questions in English
- B. Provide bilingual glossaries for difficult vocabulary
- C. Use visuals and realia to explain concepts
- D. Conduct lessons entirely in English
- E. Other

**7. How do you handle situations where students are struggling to understand English instructions or concepts?**

- A. Repeat instructions in both English and the mother tongue
- B. Provide additional examples and explanations in English
- C. Use gestures and body language to convey meaning
- D. Encourage peer assistance and collaboration
- E. Other

**8. Would you be open to participating in professional development opportunities focused on reducing the use of the mother tongue in English classes?**

Definitely yes

Yes

Neutral

No

Definitely no

**9. In your opinion, how does the use of the mother tongue impact students' language proficiency development in English?**

- A. Positively
- B. Negatively
- C. No significant impact
- D. I'm not sure

**10. What challenges, if any, do you face in minimizing the use of the mother tongue in your English classes?**

- A. Lack of resources
- B. Student resistance
- C. Time constraints
- D. Limited proficiency in English among students
- E. Other