

A Comparative Study on The Perceptions of EFL Teachers on the use of Mother Tongue

Sibel Can ACAR

Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, TURKEY

sibelcanacar@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5185-1807>

Abstract: The use of mother tongue in the L2 classroom is a controversial issue in the field of ELT. Therefore, the present study investigated the perceptions of four ELT teachers working at different private institutions on the use of mother tongue in the L2 classroom. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the data. The gathered data, which were coded and labelled, were used to explore the perceptions of the teachers and the effect of school policy on the teachers and students' feeling. The findings of the study revealed that EFL teachers have positive perceptions of using mother tongue if it is used in a limited and purposeful way. In addition, the results indicated that the English only policy has a negative impact on teachers. Yet, even if it is allowed to use L1 in the L2 classroom, EFL teachers suffer remorse. As for students, they feel comfortable and safe according to the teachers' observation.

Keywords: L1, L2, perceptions, mother tongue, language teaching, EFL teachers, L2 classroom, code switching.

İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin Yabancı Dil Sınıflarında Anadil Kullanımı Hakkındaki Algıları Üzerine Bir Karşılaştırma Çalışması

Özet: İngilizce'nin yabancı dil olarak öğretildiği sınıflarda anadil kullanımını, İngilizce öğretimi alanında hala çokça tartışılan bir konudur. Bu yüzden, bu çalışma farklı özel eğitim kurumlarında çalışan dört İngilizce öğretmeninin yabancı dil sınıfında anadil kullanımını hakkındaki algılarını incelemektedir. Veriler, yarı-yapilandırılmış görüşmeler ile toplanmıştır. Toplanan verilerin analizi ile beraber öğretmenlerin algıları ve okulların takip ettiği yabancı dil eğitimi politikalarının öğretmenler ve öğrencilerin duygularını nasıl etkilediği incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, öğretmenlerin sınıf içerisinde sınırlı bir şekilde ve belirli amaca hizmet ettiği sürece anadil kullanılması konusunda olumlu yaklaşıklarını göstermiştir. Buna ek olarak, bulgular, anadil kullanımına izin verilmeyen okul politikalarının öğretmenler üzerinde olumsuz etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Ancak, anadil kullanımına izin verilen yabancı dil sınıflarında bile İngilizce öğretmenleri, anadil kullandıklarında vicdani olarak rahat hissetmediklerini belirtmişlerdir. Öğretmenler, kendi gözlemlerine göre anadil kullanıldığında öğrencilerin kendilerini daha rahat ve güvende hissettiklerini ifade etmişlerdir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Anadil, İngilizce, algılar, dil öğretimi, İngilizce öğretmenleri, yabancı dil sınıfları, düzenek (dil) değiştirme.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Anadil, İngilizce, algılar, dil öğretimi, İngilizce öğretmenleri, yabancı dil sınıfları, düzenek (dil) değiştirme.

1. Introduction

The advancement in technology, industry and business along with the colonial expansion of English speaking countries has resulted in the spread of English. English has become not only the dominant language all over the world but also the medium of international communication (Caine, 2008; Taşkin, 2011). With the globalization, English has been occupying more and more space in people's professional and daily lives (Akulova, 2019). Therefore, different language teaching approaches and methods underpinning different assumptions emerged to teach English in the best way (Taşkin, 2011). Some of these different teaching approaches and methods value learners' first language whereas some of them ban the use of their mother tongue in the foreign language classroom. Since a number of pedagogical, linguistic, and ideological factors have affected the opinions of scholars on the issue of whether the use of mother tongue in the foreign language classroom should be banned or combined with the target language (Inal & Turhanlı, 2019), using mother tongue has been one of the foremost controversial issues in the field of ELT (Shin, Dixon & Choi, 2019).

To this date, the role of language teachers has been neglected in many of these discussions (Debreli, 2016). Yet, today, non-native teachers of English constitute the majority of English teachers in the world. Therefore, the perceptions of EFL teachers on the use of mother tongue in the L2 classroom has been the research priority. Research on this topic mostly searches for the benefits of the use of mother tongue in the L2 classroom as well as reasons behind why and when to use it. However, to my knowledge, there is not a comparative research study on the perspectives of EFL teachers working at different private educational institutions on the mother tongue use in EFL classroom and whether the policies that schools follow affect their use of L1 in the classroom.

1.1. Literature Review

Using the TL extensively and avoiding mother tongue has been a taboo for a long time. (Belz, 2003 as cited in Taşkin, 2011). This approach is justified on the grounds that the inclusion of L1 in L2 classroom impedes learners' learning process and leads to the lack of sufficient exposure to the TL and overdependence on L1 (Taşkin, 2011). These justifications are also supported by the educationalists such as Kellerman (1995), Krashen (1981) and Welchslar (1997) who claim that the more the learners are exposed to the target language, the better and the faster they acquire it (as cited in Wash & Monroy, 2019). Therefore, L1 use is seen as something which should be avoided and discouraged (Taşkin, 2011). In contrast to the arguments of L1 avoidance, there are a number of arguments that support the inclusion of L1 in TL teaching. Rolin- Ianzi and Varshney (2008) explain the main functions of the L1 by dividing them into two. The first function is called 'medium-oriented' which means teaching elements of the TL such as grammar, vocabulary, etc. by using L1. The second function is called 'framework-oriented' which refers to the use of L1 in classroom management and organization issues such as explaining homework (cited in Walsh and Monroy, 2019). The former function stresses the fact that the translation technique may become effective in making the meaning of grammatical and lexical input more clear. It can also promote learners' language awareness by leading learners to do syntactic cross-linguistic comparisons. In addition, the mother tongue can be a scaffolding tool to express meaning while developing TL communication skills. As for the framework-oriented functions, the mother tongue both helps in maintaining classroom discipline, saving time and increase the learners' confidence, make personal connections with teachers (Walsh and Monroy, 2019).

The issue of exclusion or inclusion of L1 in the L2 classroom is discussed by many researchers all over the world. (Ma, 2016; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Shin et al., 2019; Walsh & Monroy, 2019). The results of the research studies have indicated that the mother tongue may be a useful tool for the language learning process. They also reveal that L1, which is used for classroom management and translation activities to make input clear, can enhance the foreign language proficiency, facilitate and support the process of TL acquisition. In short, the role of L1 should be seen as other facilitator tools such as real objects and pictures (Akulova, 2019). On the other hand, the research studies identify two reasons why mother tongue has been neglected in ELT. The first one is that mother tongue use is often associated with the grammar translation method in which classroom instruction is given only in the mother tongue. That is why TL only stance has gained support through many ELT methods. The second one is TL only classes are often accepted as the most effective context for TL learning (Ma, 2016). However, from an ideological standpoint, Phillipson (1992) stated that this is a false ideological belief that supports English only stance. The main purpose of this false belief is to contribute to the maintenance of the dominance of English through constituting structural and cultural inequality between English and mother tongue of the learners (as cited in Auerbach, 1993).

In Turkey, according to the language teaching policy of Ministry of Education (2018), "L1 (first language) usage is not prohibited or discouraged, but it should be employed only as necessary i.e., for giving complex instructions or explaining difficult concepts" (p. 12). In contrast to that policy, particularly private schools

restrict the teachers and the learners to use English as the only medium of communication in the L2 classrooms whereas some accept optimal level of mother tongue use in the L2 classroom. Similarly, some of the state and private universities offer programmes or English preparatory classes in which English is used as a language of instruction. However, since the monolingual approach is usually imposed through language policies of educational institutions, a gap occurs between the policy and teaching practices (Ma, 2016). Among teachers and learners, the use of mother tongue in the L2 classroom is also controversial. That is the reason why researchers investigate students and teachers' opinions on the use of the mother tongue in different educational settings (Akulova, 2019; Debreli, 2016; Inal & Turhanlı, 2019; Kaymakamoğlu & Yiltanlar, 2019; Kuru & Tekin, 2019; Sali, 2011; Solhi & Büyükyazı, 2011; Taşkin, 2011; Tunçay, 2014). The results of the studies based on teachers' opinions have indicated that the teachers' attitude towards the using mother tongue are not only positive or negative but also neutral. Those who support TL only stance claim that the classroom is the only place where the learners are exposed to the TL. Those who support L1 use argue that enforcing the learners to communicate in the TL may make them feel threatened (Taşkin, 2011; Tunçay, 2014) and mother tongue may be used as awareness-raising tool and facilitator (Akulova, 2019; Büyükyazı & Solhi, 2011; Inal & Turhanlı, 2019; Kuru & Tekin, 2019; Sali, 2014).

Those who are neutral to the use of mother tongue report that other dimensions such as workplace, nationality factors and philosophy of their teaching restrict their L1 use in the classroom (Kaymakamoğlu & Yiltanlar, 2019). In addition, the findings of these research studies reveal that there are several reasons that lead teachers to use or not to use L1. Some of the reasons behind using L1 that are mentioned by the teachers are clarifying grammatical rules, defining abstract words, explaining complex topics, giving instructions, managing time effectively, avoiding fossilization, decreasing the anxiety levels of students and talking disciplinary issues (Akulova, 2019; Debreli, 2016; Inal & Turhanlı, 2019; Sali, 2011; Solhi & Büyükyazı, 2011; Taşkin, 2011; Tunçay, 2014). Especially in Debreli's study (2016), 54 non-native teachers working at four different universities reported that L1 should be used when students are expected to understand what teachers want them to do clearly, when the complex grammatical points and topics are going to be explained in order to avoid fossilization, when new vocabulary is going to be defined and when teachers want to establish good social relationships through telling jokes that are generally related with cultural issues. These non-native teachers also reported that L1 should be used in the large proportion of language lessons and it should be used in minimum level with higher proficiency level students. These findings are compatible with the findings of other studies. In contrast to the reasons for using L1, some teachers report that language classes are only places where learners are exposed to the language and have an opportunity to practice. L1 use may be a bad habit for learners. Therefore, it should be prevented (Debreli, 2016; Inal & Turhanlı, 2019; Kaymakamoğlu & Yiltanlar, 2019; Solhi & Büyükyazı, 2011; Tunçay, 2014).

The current study focuses on gathering insights for the following research questions from a narrower perspective through putting emphasis on the perspectives of EFL teachers working at different private educational institutions on using mother tongue in English language classrooms and the effect of the school policy on the use of L1 and teachers' feeling.

Research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers on the use of mother tongue in the English language classroom?
2. Do the policies that schools follow affect their feelings when the EFL teachers use the mother tongue in the classroom?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In the present study, a qualitative research design was utilized for the analysis of the data. The qualitative research design helps researchers to gain more detailed and concrete data about perceptions, beliefs, values, emotions and attitudes of individuals (Mack, MacQueen, Namey, Quest and Woodsong, 2005 as cited in Akulova, 2019). Since the purpose of this study is to explore the EFL teachers' perceptions and the effect of school policy on their attitudes regarding L1 use in EFL classroom in-depth, qualitative research instruments were employed to reach the detailed data.

2.2. Settings and Participants

The present study was conducted with four non-native EFL teachers who are working at different private educational institutions. These participants were chosen through purposeful sampling.

There are four participants consisting of one male and three female EFL teachers. All of them studied English Language Teaching at state universities. They are qualified ELT teachers with different educational degrees ranging from Bachelor's degree to Master's degree. Two female participants work in the same private university in İstanbul. One of them (Participant D) teaches preparatory classes while the other (Participant A) teaches English to the students of the faculties at the university. They both are novice teachers who have officially one-year experience. The male participant (Participant B) works in a private school. He teaches both secondary and high school students. In the secondary school, he teaches main courses in which students learn mainly grammar and vocabulary integrated with skills whereas in the high school, he teaches skills courses the focus of which is on speaking, listening, reading and writing. He is also a novice teacher who has just eight months of experience. Finally, the last female participant (Participant C) is also a novice teacher who has five months of experience. She worked in a private pre-school during 2019-2020 Fall academic year. She focused on vocabulary, listening and speaking since her students were young learners.

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews, also called as purposeful conversations, were conducted in the present study. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to be flexible in order to probe some aspects in-depth. They offer different ways of exploring participants' experiences and views (Croker & Heigham, 2009). The interview has two main questions. The first one is related to their perceptions of L1 use in the EFL classroom. The second one is about the effect of school policies on their feelings when they use L1 in the EFL classroom. Before conducting interviews, the letter of consent was sent to the participants. They were informed about the purpose of the study and for what purposes the data will be used. The participants were given pseudonyms in order to preserve their confidentiality and anonymity. These interviews were conducted via an online application called Zoom because of the spread of pandemic disease all over the world.

2.4. Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were audio-recoded. These interviews were conducted in Turkish to make participants feel comfortable and express themselves in a better way. These four audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and were translated into English by the researcher. The textual data were coded and these codes were labelled and categorised according to keyword and sentence analysis.

3. Findings

In this section, findings, which were obtained from four EFL teachers working with different grades at different private institutions, are presented. During the analysis of the data, five main categories emerged: the effect of using L1 in the L2 classroom, circumstances in which L1 can be used, the decrease or the increase in using L1 throughout the academic year, English only classes vs. L2 classes in which L1 is used and factors that affect the use of L1. In addition to those main categories, sub-categories also emerged. The unrelated information was excluded from the study.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of EFL teachers on the use of mother tongue in the English language classroom?

The data collected through semi-structured interviews reveal that L1 should be used in the L2 classroom. There emerged four main categories to explain this research question. These categories are the effect of using L1 in the L2 classroom, circumstances in which L1 can be used, the decrease or the increase in using L1 throughout the term and factors that affect the decisions about L1 use.

The Effect of Using L1 in the L2 Classroom

The EFL teachers mentioned that the effects, which emerge when they use L1, leads them to use it in the classroom. According to Participant A, as a result of using L1 in the L2 classroom, students' level of stress decreases whereas their motivation and interest in the lesson increase. She said that, "The more they feel they understand, the more their interest in the lesson increase" Participant B had a similar view as Participant A as follows:

Participant A: *Since even low-proficiency students understand, they feel happy. And they (students) understand what they do and they behave appropriately for the task.*

Participant C said that using L1 helps students to understand the aim of learning language and to raise their language awareness. As a result, they may become autonomous learners. Finally, Participant D said that the scope of using L1 in L2 classroom is broad especially when teaching the use of language.

The Circumstances in which L1 can be used.

The data indicate that EFL teachers use L1 under several specific circumstances such as establishing sincere bond, friendly classroom environment, gathering students' attention etc. Participant A thinks that L1 is necessary when the circumstances as follows:

Participant A: To be able to establish a sincere bond with children, for instance, something sounds funny, a joke can be made. We start chatting. More in such the warm-up part of the lesson. Not in the main parts of the lesson but warm-up part. To make a joke. How are you? Are you Ok? Maybe, in such greeting parts, I think that L1 can be used.

Participant A views that L1 can be used as a means of socialization in the classroom. Similarly, Participant D said that to be able to establish a friendly-classroom environment where the students feel comfortable, she uses L1. She stated this situation as follows:

Participant D: For example, friendly-like environment... If I want to think of a sincere environment, in which they feel comfortable, I switch to Turkish sometimes.

In addition, she uses L1 to gather students' attention. She stated:

Participant D: There are some Turkish words. When I use them, it sounds strange to the students. I use 'Yani, falan, hani, sey' while speaking. I sometimes change the use of conjunctions in sentences. I switch to Turkish. Then, it attracts their attention and they also like this kind of L1 use. It remains in their mind. If I want to make more difference, I use the word 'hocam' too much in the lesson. 'Hocam, yani, we know that'. I use it like that.

The circumstance in which Participant B prefers to use L1 is when there is a problem with classroom management. He said that one of his lecturers at university advised him to use L1 in order to deal with classroom management problem because L1 may be more effective on the students' behaviour. Similarly, Participant C said that there is a need to use L1 when dealing with discipline problems. She said that since the students are young learners and there might be disagreement and a fight among children, they have a difficulty to express themselves when they are angry. As a result of this discipline problem, she loses the other children's attention to the lesson. Therefore, in these situations, she thinks that L1 might be more effective to manage the class and to deal with the classroom management problems.

In addition, Participant B said that there is a need to use L1 when there is an important announcement done by the educational institution or when there is an important announcement related to the assignments. He explained this situation as follows:

Participant B: When there is an important announcement, I switch to Turkish so that the child does not misunderstand it. Since s/he misunderstands it, s/he does not do it wrong. Problems emerge when the mistakes come one after another. For example, I explain the assignment in English. The students who are good at English understand; those who are not good do not understand. When the assignment, such as the performance assignment, is a graded assignment, I explain it in Turkish or when there is an announcement of the institution.

Another circumstance is related to the improvement of the students' understanding. Participant A, C and D agree to use L1 when they want to check and strengthen the students' understanding. They said that they apply a contrastive approach to compare and contrast so that students' understanding is strengthened. In accordance with that preference, they let their students talk in L1 when it is impossible for the students to ask questions in L2 after they try to ask their questions in L2. Additionally, Participant D allows her students to use L1 when they want to learn English equivalents of Turkish idioms and proverbs. This is explained by Participant D as:

Participant D: Students like to hear the use of some Turkish idioms and proverbs or some chunks. For example, Turkish chunks such as 'Bu seferlik benden olsun' They wonder about how these chunks are used in L2. I prefer the students to express them in Turkish. They express them in Turkish. I translate them into English. They say 'Are they used like that?' It remains in their mind and their knowledge is increasing. They learn how and for what to use it.

The Decrease or the Increase in the Amount of Using L1 throughout the Academic Year

Participant A said that depending on her reflection on the necessity of using L1 after each class, she decides the amount of using L1. However, she did not realize whether the amount of using L1 decreases or increases depending on the students' development throughout the learning process. Participant D also said that there is no change throughout the process since the module of language level just last two months. Similarly, Participant C

said that there is no change because of English-only policy. As for Participant B, the decrease in using L1 is observed. He explained this decrease as follows:

Participant B: The students know that I am Turkish and they say 'Hocam, Türkçe söyleyin, Türkçe söyleyin'. After a while, I stop using L2. I mean I start to use Turkish. In the beginning, this process was long but gradually students get used to L2, I also get used to. It has decreased.

English Only Classes vs. L2 Classes in which L1 is used

The data indicate that EFL teachers think that there are differences between English only classes and L2 classes in which L1 is adjunctly used. Participant A said that there is no significant difference between these two classes if adult learners are the case. However, as for young learners, English-only classes might be more effective than L2 classes where L1 is adjunctly used. She also said that the effectiveness of the English only classes depends on the level of students' accustomedness. She explained it as follows:

Participant A: The effectiveness of English only classes depends on the level of students' accustomedness. I worked at a school where L1 is forbidden and English is the only medium of communication. The students themselves became the authority. For example, I came across a situation... I spoke Turkish mistakenly. I said 'Evet'. The children were shocked. They looked at me.

In the example of Participant A, students got used to English classes and even if the teacher speaks in Turkish, it sounds strange to them.

Participant B said that because of the amount of exposure, the only difference between these two classes might be in terms of pronunciation and speaking. This is explained by Participant B:

Participant B: The only difference might be this: since they are more exposed to English in English only classes, there might be a change in terms of auditory and speech, maybe in their accents.

Participant D said that students' listening skills and their comprehension level may be better than the students who study in L2 class where L1 is adjunctly used. The students in English only classes may internalize the use of the target language as an only medium. As for Participant C, she said that the students' proficiency levels influence the effectiveness of these two classes. Therefore, it cannot be said that one is better than the other is.

The Factors That Affect the Decisions about L1 Use

The data collected indicate that there are different factors that affect the decision of using L1 in the L2 classroom. Under this category, there are five sub-categories: student-based factors, teacher-based factors, factors related to the skills taught, proficiency level of students and school policy.

Student-Based Factors

The data indicate that there are some factors related to students that affect the decision about L1 use. Participant A said that sometimes students' negative reaction to the use of L2 makes her switch Turkish. She explained this situation as follows:

Participant A: There are some student-based factors. Student-based factors are as follows: I attend the class, start to explain. If I get a negative reaction, if there is a negative atmosphere since they do not understand anything... This happens especially with adult learners. I get a reaction. The reaction I get is that we do not understand. They make me feel that the thing I do is in vain. I am overwhelmed by this reaction of students in these situations. For this reason, I start to blend two languages. I start to use code-switching.

She also said that when the students start to react negatively and she keeps speaking in English, she and her students are not able to find common ground. As result, there emerges a communication breakdown. She said that at this time, she has to switch to Turkish.

Participant B said that there are several factors that lead him to use L1 in the L2 classroom. One of them is the effect of previous learning experiences of the students on his use of L1 in the L2 classroom. He explained this effect as follows:

Participant B: Now, students meet with you this year. And these students have habits. For example, English has been taught since 2nd grade. And my students are studying at secondary school or high school. How English is taught at primary school, how they get used to learn... For instance, s/he says 'apple', after that directly says 'elma'. Students get used to this, and then they come to me. I use

movements. I use my body language...I showed them the picture of the word by searching via Google pictures. Although the child saw the image, s/he asked me the Turkish of the word.

Similarly, Participant D said that the previous learning experiences of the students should be taken into account because if the students are not familiar to her way of teaching, they do not like it and do not want to learn it in the way she teaches. Therefore, how the students want to learn, their needs and their previous experiences cannot be ignored. For example, after she acts out the word nearly for 15 minutes, the reaction of the students generally is to ask her why she did not say the word directly instead of acting out. She said that if the students need to hear Turkish in a specific time, she uses L1 to meet this need.

Participant B also said that he allows students to switch between language systems to increase the students' self-confidence. He said that while speaking, students forget some words and he does not want them to stop speaking because the students may begin to hesitate to speak. Therefore, he lets them use Turkish equivalences of English words while speaking in English. Similarly, Participant D said that some students experience a high level of anxiety. To be able to make them feel comfortable, sometimes communicating in Turkish is important. However, if the teacher knows that the student is able to communicate in English, Turkish should not be used just to make the student feel safe and secure. In addition, if the students are in need of learning the Turkish version of an English sentence or vice versa to express them properly, then she uses L1 to help them to construct this sentence. Participant C said that sometimes students might experience emotional problems. They cannot express themselves in English. They may feel the need of speaking English to solve these problems. In this time, Turkish should be used to meet the students' needs.

Teachers-based Factors

Unlike the other teachers, Participant A said that the fear of not being understood affects her use of L1 in the L2 classroom. She explained it as follows:

Participant A: The factor that is based on me is, I suppose, fear. The fear of not being understood. If I say this in English, they do not understand. Because of this fear... It affects me a little. I suppose that I switch to Turkish directly. This means it has not positive effect on me.

Factors Related to the Skills Taught

The idea emerging from the data reveals that the teachers' perceptions of the use of L1 change depending on the skills that are taught in the L2 classroom. In this study, the EFL teachers prefer to use L1 while explaining grammar rules and key points of these rules to support students' understanding. All of them also said that L1 should not be used in speaking activities such as group work or discussion and while giving instructions during the speaking lessons. The reasons why L1 should not be used are that using only L2 while speaking activities provides real-life communication, challenges and motivates the students, and makes the lesson more effective. In addition, Participant A said that L1 should not be used in the main parts of lesson in which the students are exposed to the target language and the goals of the lesson are achieved.

Participant A and D prefer to use translation as a method while teaching reading because they said that students need to create their own meaning from the text they read. In addition, with the help of translation, they can check whether the students comprehend the text or not. Also, Participant D said that L1 can be used while teaching listening. She explained the reason as follows:

Participant D: I use translation in listening lessons. I think that it is very effective in listening. The child hears. S/he does not understand what it exactly means but if I say the words in Turkish, and then, for example, I open it again and by recalling the English version of the word, which I said, s/he listens again the part that s/he did not understand before. And s/he tries to find English version of the word that she knows in Turkish.

Participant C and D agreed to use L1 while teaching new vocabulary. They think that by using the similarity between two languages, the words can be taught in a catchy way.

The Proficiency Levels of the Students

The data indicate that the proficiency level of students influences the perceptions of EFL teachers on the use of L1. Participant A explained that since the students, who have a low-level language proficiency, do not know the language and encounter with the target language for the first time, she does not feel switching Turkish necessary. She observed that when she speaks in English, the motivation of those students increases and her authority, as a teacher, in the eyes of those students increases. She also mentioned that since she has the feeling of not being judged by students who have low-level language proficiency, she prefers to use L2 in the classroom. However, when she teaches the students who have high-level language proficiency, she experiences the feeling of not

having enough proficiency to give instruction in this L2 classroom. That feeling increases her anxiety level. She switches to Turkish even if the students do not need any explanation in L1.

Participant B said that since all of the students' language proficiency levels and background knowledge in a class are not equal or the similar to each other, he feels the need of using L1 limitedly to teach L2 equally to the students who have low, optimal or high-level proficiency. As for the students who have high proficiency levels, he prefers the minimum use of L1. He said that the reason for L1 use at the minimum level might be classroom management problems. Similarly, Participant C said that if she worked with the students who have a higher-level proficiency, she would not use L1. She thinks that these students' understanding might be developed with different techniques such as paraphrasing.

Participant D said that the students, who have a higher-level proficiency, might try to express complex ideas in L2. However, when they have difficulty to express and explain what they think, she prefers her students to switch Turkish. She helps them to construct the sentence by using L1. As for low-proficiency classes, she prefers to tell jokes in L1; otherwise, she does not get any reaction to the jokes she makes.

The final factor is school policy and its effect on the teacher and the students. This factor is an answer to the research question two.

Research Question 2: Do the policies that schools follow affect their feelings when the EFL teachers use the mother tongue in the classroom?

This factor has a main category: social policy. Under this main category, two sub-categories emerged. These are English only-policy and using L1 at the optimal level in the L2 classroom.

Participant A and C said that their institutions follow English-only policy. Participant A said that there are some activities under the title of professional development. She believes that these activities are not actually professional development activities. They are used for evaluating the teachers' teaching and use of language. She feels under pressure and has the feeling of being judged by the superiors. This increases her anxiety level while teaching. Moreover, she said that there are times when I need to explain in Turkish to make the input clear and effective for the student. Because of this policy, she cannot switch to Turkish and this created a negative effect on the student's learning.

Participant C said that English only policy decreases her motivation and leads to have a feeling of inadequacy since she cannot switch to Turkish when it is necessary. She said that when students have emotional problems, they do not want to speak in English and she has to ask other teachers for help, which leads to the feeling of inadequacy. As for students, they do not feel comfortable, their motivation decreases and they resist speaking in English.

Participant B and D said that their institutions allow them to use L1 at the optimal level. However, both of the teachers suffer remorse and feel disappointment when they use L1 in the L2 classroom. Their motivation decreases since they have to switch to Turkish and students do not understand them when they speak in English. Yet, both teachers said that their students become comfortable when they switch to Turkish. This was explained by Participant D as follows:

Participant D: *"It is always an advantageous situation for the students. Because they feel comfortable. I took even reactions like 'Oh be, anladım nihayet!' 'Hocam, sonunda ya!'*

4. Discussion

The current study tried to provide a picture of the perceptions of EFL teachers working at different private institutions on the use of mother tongue in the L2 classroom and the effect of the school policy on the use of L1 and teachers and students' feeling. The findings show that EFL teachers' perceptions can be analysed under five main categories: the effect of using L1 in the L2 classroom, circumstances in which L1 can be used, the decrease or the increase in the amount of using L1 throughout the academic year, English only classes vs. L2 classes in which L1 is adjunctly used and factors that affect the process of making the decision about L1 use. The categories that emerged from the analysis of data are in line with two main functions of L1 use determined by Rolin- Ianziti and Varshney (2008). All categories can be considered as sub-categories of medium-oriented functions and framework-oriented functions. Regarding these categories, the results indicate that all of the teachers agree to use L1 at the optimal level in the L2 classroom. Depending on the grades that they teach, there is not much difference on the perceptions of the teachers.

The first category emerged from the data analysis show that L1 can be used to decrease the students' anxiety level and to increase students' motivation. This finding is compatible with the previous studies in the literature (Akulova, 2019; Debreli, 2016; Inal & Turhanlı, 2019; Sali, 2011; Solhi & Büyükyazı, 2011; Taşkin, 2011; Tunçay, 2014). However, those who oppose to the use of L1 say that students can become lazy and dependent on L1 prompts. In addition, EFL teachers stated that they prefer to use L1 since it can facilitate the language learning process, raise students' awareness and can help students to understand the aim of language learning process. This effect of using L1 coincides with the ones proposed by Akulova (2019), Büyükyazı and Solhi (2011), Inal and Turhanlı, (2019), Kuru and Tekin (2019) and Sali (2014). In contrast to these findings, there are findings that show that the use of L1 is considered as a barrier for the development of the students' fluency and the amount of time that they are exposed to L2 (Akulova, 2019).

According to the second category, teachers reported that they prefer to use L1 under these circumstances: when making jokes, building social connections, greeting students, solving classroom management problems and discipline problems, applying a contrastive approach to support students' understanding, giving instructions or making announcements, attracting students' attention and letting students ask questions related to complex issues. The findings of the studies conducted by Akulova (2019), Debreli (2016), Inal and Turhanlı (2019), Kaymakamoğlu and Yıltanlılar (2019), Sali (2011), Solhi and Büyükyazı (2011), Taşkin (2011) and Tunçay (2014) reveal the similar results.

As for the decrease or the increase in the amount of using L1 throughout the academic year, the two of teachers reported that there is no change in the amount of L1 use since they use it at the optimal level. One of participants said that the amount of L1 used changes each week depending on the necessity of using L1 and the activities whereas the other reported that the amount of L1 used in the L2 classroom decreases towards the end of the academic year. In the study conducted by Taşkin (2011), it is reported that there is not a linear decrease or increase in the amount of L1 used but it changes depending on the types of the activities and the needs of students throughout the academic year.

According to the literature on the issue of the use of mother tongue, it is found that EFL teachers may tend to perceive English-only classes more effective in language learning process (Ma, 2016). In contrast to that perception, the teachers in the present study reported that depending on their experience, there is not a significant difference between English-only classes and L2 classes where L1 is adjunctly used. They said that there might be a difference in terms of pronunciation, listening comprehension and speaking if the young learners are the case. This difference might be because of the amount of exposure to the L2.

As for the last category, teachers' decision-making process about the necessity of using L1 is affected by several factors: student-based factors, teacher-based factors, skills that are taught, the language proficiency levels of the students and the school policy. Unlike the other studies on this issue, students' reaction to L2 use or L1 use and previous experiences are the factors that affect teachers' decision-making process in the present study. Auerbach (1993) proposed that students are knowledgeable to decide when to use and not to use L1. In addition, raising the students' self-confidence is another factor that is consistent with the other studies' findings (Taşkin, 2011; Tunçay, 2014). In contrast to the findings of other studies conducted by Debreli (2016), Kaymakamoğlu and Yıltanlılar (2019) and Taşkin (2011), one of the teachers in the present study reported that she uses L1 at the minimum level while teaching at the beginner or elementary levels since the use of L2 increases these students' motivation by challenging them. Yet, she tends to use L1 more while teaching at advanced levels. The reason is the fear of not being understood and the fear of being judged by the students. On the other hand, teachers prefer to use only L2 while teaching speaking whereas they prefer to use L1 as a translation tool and a facilitator while teaching reading, vocabulary and some grammatical key points. One of the teacher also said that L1 is useful while teaching listening. In Kuru and Tekin' study (2019), it is found that teacher candidates prefer to use L1 mostly while teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing. Besides, similar to the findings of Debreli (2016), teachers agree that L1 should not be intruding on the general pace.

With regards to the second research question, the findings of the present study are compatible with the existing literature on the issue. The findings of the studies conducted by Akulova (2019), and Taşkin (2011) reveal that English-only policy has a negative impact on teachers' and students' feelings and perceptions. Teachers experience high-level anxiety and the feeling of inadequacy. Even if they are allowed to use L1 at the optimal level, they suffer remorse since they use L1. According to Conpland and Neokleous' study (1993), teachers can over-report the use of L1 even if they use it a little amount of time since they perceive using L1 negatively. As for students, they feel uncomfortable. Yet, when L1 is used, they feel too relaxed according to the teachers' observation.

5. Conclusion

The current study tried to draw a detailed picture of the perceptions of EFL teachers on mother tongue use. The findings draw some parallels with the existing literature on this issue. It is seen that even if EFL teachers work at the different private institutions, their perceptions on the use of mother tongue is similar to each other. In addition, limited and reasonable use of L1 in the L2 classroom can facilitate teaching and learning process. In addition, it is seen that English-only policy has a negative effect on students and teachers' feelings. Even if the teachers are allowed to use L1, they feel disappointed and suffer remorse when they use L1. As for students, they feel safe and secure, and comfortable.

Although using L1 in the L2 classroom is discussed by many, there is not a consensus on the topic. Since the policies are developed by those who do not participate in teaching and learning process, they are not going beyond being prescriptive documents. As the research itself suggest, policy makers and language institutions should take new findings in the field into account. They should also prioritize the teachers' opinions and suggestions since they are the active agents of teaching and learning process.

The present study has some limitations. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population. Also, more detailed data can be obtained by observing these EFL teachers in the L2 classroom. Finally, the data related to students' perceptions on the use of L1 can be collected so that perceptions of the students can be compared and contrasted with the perceptions of teachers.

Further research can be conducted by extending the participant numbers. In addition, the criteria such as the duration of work experiences and gender difference can be taken into consideration. On the other hand, all of the teachers mentioned that L1 can help students to retain the knowledge. That's why the effect of L1 on the level of retention and how it can influence the achievement can be explored.

Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Bir İngilizce öğretmeni olarak, sizce İngilizce sınıfında anadil kullanımını öğrenmeyi nasıl etkiler?
 - 1a. Hangi durumlarda Türkçe kullanmanın uygun olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz? Neden bu durumlarda gerekli olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?
 - 1b. Sizce derste Türkçe kullanımınızı etkileyen faktörler nelerdir?
 - 1c. Hangi durumlarda kesinlikle Türkçe kullanılmamalıdır?
 - 1d. Eğitim verdığınız sınıfın dil yeterliliği anadil kullanımınızı etkiliyor mu? Neden?
 - 1e. Eğer şu an eğitim verdığınız sınıfın daha yüksek dil yeterliliği olan öğrencilerle olsaydınız bu ana dil kullanımınızı etkiler miydi?
 - 1f. Dönemci dederslerdeki kullandığınız Türkçemiktarıdeğişiklik gösteriyor mu?
 - 1g. Öğrettiğiniz beceri Türkçe kullanma miktارınızı etkiliyor mu?
 - 1h. Öğrencilerinizin hangi durumlarda Türkçe kullanmasını uygun buluyorsunuz? Neden bu durumlarda gerekli olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?
 - 1i. Sadece İngilizce kullanılan sınıflarla ana dil kullanımına izin verilen sınıflar arasında herhangi bir fark var mıdır?
2. Çalışığınız eğitimin kurumunda taki pedilendil öğretim politikası anadil kullanmanıza izin veriyor mu?
 - 2a. Siz veya öğrencileriniz derslerinizde anadil kullandığınızda ne hissediyorsunuz?
3. Şimdiye kadar söylediklerinize eklemek istediğiniz bir şey var mı?

References

- Akulova, B. (2019). Teachers' and Students' attitude towards L1 use in English Classroom in contexts of Turkey and Kyrgyzstan. Sakarya University, Turkey.
- Auerbach, E. R. (1993). Re-examining English Only in the ESL Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(1), 9-32.
- Büyükyazı, M. & Solhi, M. (2011). The Use of First Language in the EFL Classroom: A Facilitating or Debilitating Device? Paper presented at *1st International Conference on Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, Sarajevo. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303610200>
- Caine T. M. (2008). Do You Speak Global? The Spread of English and the Implications for English Language Teaching. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 1(1).
- Copland, F. & Neokleous, G. (1993). L1 to teach L2: complexities and contradictions. *ELT Journal*. Retrieved from eltj.oxfordjournals.org

- Croker, R &Heigham, J. (2009). Interviews. In *Qualitative Research in Applied Linguistics: A Practical Introduction*, pp. 182-192. New York & London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Debreli, E. (2016). Perceptions of Non-Native EFL Teachers on L1 use in L2 Classrooms: Implications for Language Program Development. *English Language Teaching*, 9(3), 24-32.
- Inal, S., &Turhanlı, I. (2019). Teachers' opinions on the use of L1 in EFL classes. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 15(3), 861-875.
- Kaymakamoğlu, S. &Yiltanlılar, A. (2019). Non-native English teachers' perceptions about using Turkish (L1) in EFL classrooms: A case study. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 6(2), 327-337
- Kuru, E.M. &Tekin, M. (2019). A Comparative Study on the Perspectives of EFL Teacher Candidates and Vocational High School Students on L1 Use in English Classrooms. *International Association of Research in Foreign Language and Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 42-63.
- Ma, L.P.F (2016). Examining the Functions of L1 use through Teacher and Student Interactions in an Adult Migrant English Classroom. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 22(4), 386-401.
- McMillan, B.A. & Rivers, D. J. (2011). The Practice of Policy: Teacher attitudes toward "English only". *System*, 39, 251-263.
- Sali, P. (2014). An Analysis of the Teachers' use of L1 in Turkish EFL Classrooms. *System*, 42, 308-318.
- Shin, J.Y., Dixon, L.Q. & Choi, Y. (2019). An Updated Review on Use of L1 in Foreign Language Classrooms. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1684928>
- Taşkin, A. (2011). Perceptions on Using L1 in Language Classrooms: A Case Study in a Turkish Private University. Middle East Technical University, Turkey.
- Timor, T. (2012). Use of the Mother Tongue in Teaching a Foreign Language. *Language Education in Asia*, 3(1).
- Tunçay, B. (2014). Teachers' Attitudes towards and Practices of L1 Use in EFL Classroom. Bilkent University, Turkey.
- Turkish Ministry of Education (2018). İngilizceDersiÖğretimProgramı. Retrieved on May 2, 2020 from: <http://mufredat.meb.gov.tr/Dosyalar/201812411191321%C4%B0NG%C4%80L%C4%80ZCE%20%C3%96%C4%9ERET%C4%80M%20PROGRAMI%20Klas%C3%B6r%C3%BC.pdf>
- Walch, A. & Monroy, F. (2019). Beliefs about L1 Use in teaching English: A Comparative Study of Polish and Spanish Teacher- Trainers. *Language Teaching Research*, 1-19.

Note on Ethical Issues

The author confirms that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 08/12/2020).