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Analytical Hierarchy Process in Identifying and Ranking Factors Affecting L1 Use among Iranian EFL Teachers

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Abstract

Consolidating the students' L1 permits instructors to supply clear clarifications and moderate potential challenges in comprehension. By recognizing the esteem of L1, instructors can advance more successful dialect instruction. Hence, this ponder investigated the essential variables influencing Iranian instructors' utilization of L1 in EFL classrooms. The members of the think-about group were chosen through comfort inspection. A pairwise survey was conducted, and 32 tall school English instructors from Gorgan, Golestan, Iran, reacted to the questions. Along these lines, 20 instructors out of 32 were chosen based on their level of instruction and the consistency of their reactions. They were counseled on how the pairwise survey was answered to get more reliable reactions. After analyzing the information utilizing the Master Choice computer program and Explanatory Chain of command Handle (AHP), it was uncovered that instructors, for the most part, favored utilizing L1 to decrease negative full of feeling channels in a classroom environment, such as making less tense environment, additionally improving positive emotional channels like motivating the learners. It was also concluded that the other reasons behind the teacher's L1 utilization were for classroom administration purposes, social targets, and cognitive engagement of the understudies. The discoveries of this thinking suggest that EFL instructors and TEFL approach producers join L1 in teaching-learning and prepare more viably and intentionally.

Keywords: analytic hierarchy process, EFL classroom, first language

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1. Introduction

The use of the mother tongue (L1) in foreign (FL) or second language (L2) instruction remains a contentious issue, drawing significant attention from researchers (Taşçı & Aksu Ataç, 2020). The debate stems from differing theoretical perspectives on the role of L1 in L2 learning and teaching (Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz, 2011). While some scholars advocate for its inclusion to facilitate comprehension and ease learning, others argue that exclusive use of the target language fosters greater immersion and proficiency.

In today's interconnected world, acquiring a foreign language is highly valuable as it enhances communication, fosters cultural understanding, and expands opportunities (Fox et al., 2019). Proficiency in another language allows individuals to engage with diverse communities and strengthens their position in the global job market, where multilingualism is a sought-after skill (Grosse, 2004). Learning a new language enhances cognitive functions, reinforces memory, and sharpens problem-solving abilities, contributing to personal and professional growth (Zhang, 2022). Whether for travel, career advancement, or intellectual development, mastering a foreign language is a crucial investment that unlocks numerous opportunities.

Language instruction incorporates a variety of teaching methods, each designed to accommodate different learning styles and objectives. Given the diversity of student needs, a single approach may not be practical for all learners. By adopting flexible teaching strategies, educators can tailor their methods to suit various proficiency levels, learning preferences, and cultural backgrounds (Kohonen, 2014). Employing various instructional techniques—such as communicative activities, multimedia resources, and real-world simulations—enables teachers to create engaging and compelling learning experiences. This adaptability ensures that all students receive the necessary support to succeed in their language-learning journey. Additionally, being open to new approaches and adapting to evolving educational trends can enhance the effectiveness of language instruction and keep students motivated and engaged (Wen-Cheng et al., 2011). By embracing flexibility, teachers can create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that fosters language acquisition and empowers students to reach their full potential.

Despite some methods that believe using L1 is “the great sin” in the classroom, using L1 in a foreign language class by the teacher can significantly aid the learning process. Many experts believe that when learners are exposed to explanations, instructions, and examples in their native language, it helps them understand complex concepts more quickly. Also, the L1 allows learners to grasp the meaning and nuances of the target language. Moreover, it allows them to connect the familiar structures and vocabulary of their native language and the new language they are learning (Voicu, 2012). Additionally, using L1 can help alleviate any confusion or frustration that learners may experience when faced with unfamiliar grammar rules or vocabulary (Zhao et al., 2013). However, teachers need to strike a balance and gradually reduce the reliance on the L1 as learners progress in their language proficiency. This approach ensures that learners develop the necessary skills to communicate effectively in the target language while still benefiting from the support of their native language during the initial stages of language acquisition (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2013). The present study aimed to investigate why English teachers use their first language (Farsi) in EFL classrooms in Iran and to identify and rank those reasons and factors.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Learning a foreign language is crucial in today’s interconnected world, providing individuals with cultural exposure, enhanced communication abilities, and cognitive benefits. It offers advantages in both personal and professional domains, as multilingual proficiency is highly valued in the global job market (Fox et al., 2019; Grosse, 2004). Beyond career prospects, language learning contributes to cognitive development, improving memory, problem-solving skills, and overall mental agility (Zhang, 2022). Given these benefits, foreign language instruction must be carefully designed to maximize learning outcomes, considering different teaching approaches and learner needs. Various instructional methods, such as the communicative approach, direct method, audio-lingual method, and task-based learning, cater to different learning styles and objectives, providing educators with flexibility in their teaching strategies (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Teachers must be adaptable in selecting and implementing teaching methods to ensure effective language instruction, as a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach may not suit diverse learners (Kohonen, 2014; Tsui, 2003). Educators can create engaging and inclusive learning environments by integrating various instructional techniques, including communicative activities, multimedia resources, and real-life simulations (Wen-Cheng et al., 2011). One key aspect of instructional flexibility is integrating the first language (L1) in foreign language (L2) classrooms, which has sparked debate among researchers. While some scholars argue that L1 use facilitates L2 acquisition and does not hinder learning (Liando et

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al., 2023), others have expressed concerns about its impact. This ongoing discussion highlights the need for further research into the role of L1 in foreign language instruction, examining its benefits and potential limitations.

1.2 Research Questions

This research is crystallized around the two questions below:

What are the most critical factors affecting the use of L1 by Iranian EFL teachers?

How are those factors ranked?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Studies Opposing the Use of L1

In a review of the works of researchers against L1 use, Orfan (2023), in his recent paper, claimed that using L1 could lead to negative consequences. He believed that instructors' use of L1 can interfere with students' learning. Hawa et al. (2021) also thought that the adverse effect of applying the mother tongue was a barrier to improving students' skills to the maximum. Moreover, Copland and Ni (2019, as cited in Aminifard & Mehrpour, 2019) stated that when teachers excessively rely on L1, it can undermine the intended supportive functions of L1 and hinder children's efforts in developing positive bilingual identities.

According to Bardovi-harling and Sprouse (2018), negative transfer manifests itself in different linguistic domains, including phonetics and phonology (or pronunciation), morphology and syntax, vocabulary, and pragmatics. Also, Turnbull (2018) indicated that while the teachers involved in the study were somewhat open to using the first L1 in certain situations, their acceptance was constrained, suggesting a partial comprehension on the whole.

Moreover, Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) claimed that the study on Iranian pre-university classrooms indicated that excessive reliance on the Persian language (L1) had a demotivating impact on students. "Hence, the interviewed students voiced dissatisfaction with the untimely use and domination of L1 in L2 classes" (Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz, 2011, p. 135). Moreover, Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) claimed that the study on Iranian pre-university classrooms indicated that excessive reliance on the Persian language (L1) had a demotivating impact on students. "Hence, the interviewed students voiced their dissatisfaction with the untimely use and domination of L1 in L2 classes" (Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz, 2011, p. 135).

The use of L1 in EFL classrooms was traditionally perceived as harmful to language acquisition. Some researchers, such as Ford (2009), argued that reliance on L1 reduces students' effort, as they do not need to engage in L2 thinking fully. Similarly, Miles (2004) suggested that incorporating L1 in the classroom hinders EFL learning by limiting students' opportunities to practice.

Nevertheless, numerous studies highlight the importance of strong English proficiency in helping students grasp subject matter more effectively. Mastery of English facilitates comprehension and fosters a "confidence-effectiveness" cycle, where increased proficiency enhances students' confidence, leading to improved learning outcomes. However, it is worth noting that research provides limited evidence to support the claim that exclusive English instruction yields significantly more significant proficiency gains compared to bilingual approaches (Min et al., 2023).

2.2 Studies Supporting the Limited and Judicious Use of L1

Undoubtedly, an excessive dependence on the L1 has emerged as a potential concern that may hinder the achievement of proficiency in the target language. Nonetheless, Liando et al. (2023) claimed that the outcomes of their study indicated that incorporating L1 in EFL classrooms can yield advantages. Still, its usage should be tempered to prevent students from excessively depending on it. They suggested that the use of L1 in EFL classrooms can be beneficial. However, it should be used in moderation to avoid students becoming too reliant. They also claimed that teachers should use L1 to facilitate learning, not as a substitute for the target language.

The results of the study conducted by Sarica (2023) also revealed a positive correlation between the student's native language (Turkish) and English language scores. Regarding the use of L1, learners and educators do not have hostile attitudes when it is well-planned and used to a reasonable extent (Sarica, 2023). Adil (2019) conducted a study on the practical application of learners' L1 to teaching meaning in EFL classes. His research findings revealed that the judicious use of L1 in L2 teaching environments could benefit language learners and create a conducive learning atmosphere. According to this viewpoint, teachers should resort to their students' L1 only when they have exhausted all other ways of communication in the target language. By doing so, they aim to ensure effective message delivery and enhance comprehension.

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Similarly, Jingxia (2008) supported a thoughtful approach to L1 inclusion, suggesting that teachers should adjust L1 use based on lesson content to enhance instruction in EFL settings. In this regard, Macaro (2001) emphasized that while teachers can determine when and how much L1 should be used, its inclusion should always remain limited within L2 syllabi. Cook (2001) also reinforced that a well-planned and judicious use of L1 can yield positive learning outcomes. Given the potential benefits of incorporating L1, researchers have explored the reasons and factors influencing its use in second or foreign-language classrooms. Studies have sought to understand how and why students and instructors rely on their native language during L2 instruction, aiming to optimize the learning process (e.g., Mohamadi et al., 2023; Orfan, 2023; Suantara, 2023).

The debate over L1 use in EFL classrooms has led to contrasting perspectives. While some theories oppose it, others support its inclusion under specific conditions. Proponents emphasize that L1 should be employed in a structured and judicious manner. In this context, the present study explores the motivations behind L1 use in Iranian EFL classrooms. Specifically, it seeks to identify and prioritize the factors influencing instructors' decisions to incorporate L1 in their teaching practices.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Learning a foreign language is crucial in today's interconnected world, providing individuals with cultural exposure, enhanced communication abilities, and cognitive benefits. It offers advantages in both personal and professional domains, as multilingual proficiency is highly valued in the global job market (Fox et al., 2019; Grosse, 2004). Beyond career prospects, language learning contributes to cognitive development, improving memory, problem-solving skills, and overall mental agility **(**Zhang, 2022). Given these benefits, foreign language instruction must be carefully designed to maximize learning outcomes, considering different teaching approaches and learner needs. Various instructional methods, such as the communicative approach, direct method, audio-lingual method, and task-based learning, cater to different learning styles and objectives, providing educators with flexibility in their teaching strategies (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

To ensure effective language instruction, teachers must be adaptable in selecting and implementing teaching methods, as a rigid, one-size-fits-all approach may not suit diverse learners (Kohonen, 2014; Tsui, 2003). By integrating a range of instructional techniques, including communicative activities, multimedia resources, and real-life simulations, educators can create engaging and inclusive learning environments (Wen-Cheng et al., 2011). One key aspect of instructional flexibility is the integration of the first language (L1) in foreign language (L2) classrooms, a topic that has sparked debate among researchers. While some scholars argue that L1 use facilitates L2 acquisition and does not hinder learning (Liando et al., 2023), others have expressed concerns about its impact. This ongoing discussion highlights the need for further research into the role of L1 in foreign language instruction, examining its benefits and potential limitations.

3.2 Participants

The participants that took part in the study were 20 Iranian male (5) and female (15) High School EFL teachers. They all held Master's degrees in TEFL, and their age ranged from 26 to 45. They were chosen from 32 High School EFL teachers in Gorgan, Golestan, Iran. They were selected through convenience sampling and asked to respond to the handed questionnaire. Convenience sampling was chosen because it is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected according to their accessibility and proximity. The 20 chosen teachers were settled based on their level of education and the reasonable consistency of their responses. Their L1 was Farsi. To obtain more reliable results, the criteria and the research methodology were explained and discussed with the sample group before completing the questionnaire.

3.3 Instruments

The study used a pairwise comparison questionnaire, which had been influenced by the work of decision theorists such as Saaty (1987), who contributed to the understanding of subjective comparisons and mathematical models for decision-making. This type of questionnaire uses a series of head-to-head pair votes to compare and rank the list of options. No pre-designed questionnaire was used, and the researcher designed it. This type of questionnaire has been extensively used to rank a set of options based on the preferences of a group of respondents, which is evidence of its reliability and validity. Nevertheless, to ensure that the pairwise questionnaire would still yield consistent responses, the nature of the criteria and how the questionnaire was answered were discussed in online face-to-face meetings with the participants.

3.4 Procedure

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The following procedure was pursued to answer the research questions. Different steps were taken in designing the questionnaire. First, a comprehensive review of documents and library resources such as books, student theses, and journals was done to identify the significant criteria. Also, 15 TEFL Ph.D holders in Golestan and Mazandaran universities were asked about their perceptions of the findings. Second, the noteworthy criteria were selected, which were four factors, including cognitive engagement, affective filter, social objectives, and classroom management. Then, each of these criteria was assigned to several sub-criteria. The picked-up sub-criteria for cognitive engagement were five factors: understanding complex topics and concepts, giving instructions, error correction, grammar explanation, and meaning comprehension. The chosen sub-criteria for the affective filter were four factors: boosting motivation, inspiring learners, encouraging students to learn more, and making a less tense and more comfortable atmosphere. For the third criterion, social objectives, three sub-criteria were given: counting, building connections between L1 and TL culture, socializing of students, and increasing interaction flow. Finally, three sub-criteria were selected for the last criteria, which included saving time, controlling the class, and organizing the class. The questionnaire contained 28 items with a 1-9 point scale to measure teachers' opinions on L1 use in EFL classrooms.

After designing the questionnaire and experts' approval, to have a homogeneous group of participants, the questionnaire was distributed to 32 EFL teachers of 10 different High Schools in Gorgan, Golestan, to compare and score the factors and reasons for using L1 in EFL classrooms by teachers. After that, 20 teachers were selected for the study based on their level of education and the consistency of their responses. Then, to check the reliability of the pairwise questionnaire, the nature of the criteria and how the questionnaire is answered were discussed in online face-to-face meetings with the participants. Finally, the responses were analyzed through the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to investigate the research questions.

Voluntary participants were selected through convenience sampling. After gathering all the completed questionnaires, volunteers with higher levels of education (Master's degree) were chosen with the proper consistency in their responses. Then, online meetings were held to ensure that participants were thoroughly knowledgeable about the presented criteria and how pairwise questionnaires work so that they could make the needed changes to guarantee both the reliability and consistency of the responses. The reason for employing pairwise comparison design is to determine the relative importance of the reasons behind using L1 in EFL classrooms by English teachers. The collected quantitative data was analyzed using the Expert Choice program.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this research used descriptive statistics and prioritization with the AHP method. In descriptive statistics, the distribution of the characteristics of the respondents was scrutinized. Questions presented in the first section of the paired comparison questionnaire examined the characteristics of the respondents in terms of gender, age, education, and work experience. In prioritization with the AHP method, a hierarchical decision tree was created, which showed the factors that were compared and competing options evaluated in the decision. Then, a series of paired comparisons took place. These comparisons showed the weight of each criterion in line with the competing options assessed in the decision. Finally, the logic of the AHP method combined the matrices resulting from pairwise comparisons with each other to obtain the optimal decision. All data of the current study was analyzed using Expert Choice software. Data input and processing were performed with the same software.

4. Results

4.1 Investigating the First Research Question

First of all, by reviewing the previous literature and research, such as books and journals, to identify and evaluate essential factors of L1 use by teachers, a hierarchical decision tree was designed, and the result of this step was 18 practical factors categorized in the form of 4 main factors.

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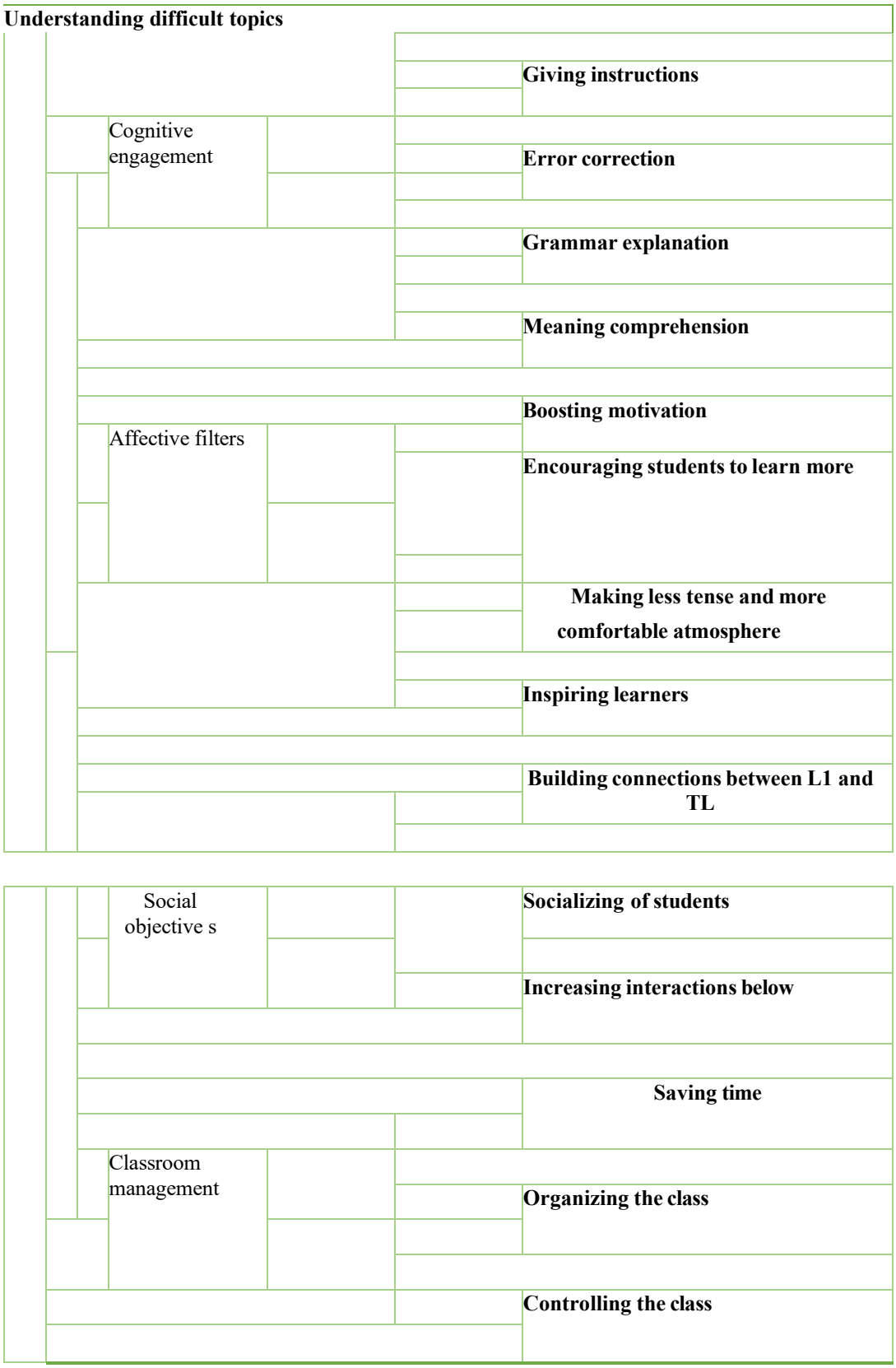


Fig. 1. Hierarchical tree diagram of identified factors of l1 use by teachers

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4.2 Investigating the Second Research Question

To rank factors of L1 use in EFL classrooms by teachers, after completing all the questionnaires, the inconsistency rate of each was examined separately. Finally, 20 questionnaires were analyzed, and participants' opinions were combined using Expert Choice software. This software has extensive facilities for obtaining the matrices of pairwise comparisons of individuals and then combining the matrices of various individuals and converting them into a single matrix, which is obtained through the geometric mean of individual elements of the matrices of individuals.

4.3 Calculating the Weight of Level One Criteria

Considering that level one had four criteria (Cognitive engagement, affective filter, social objective, and classroom management), the number of comparisons was equal to $\frac{n-(n-1)}{2} = \frac{4(4-1)}{2} = 6$.

Table 1 presents the pairwise comparison matrix of the main criteria, and Figure 2 shows the main criteria's calculated weights (importance).

Table 1. Pairwise comparison matrix of the main criteria

Main criteria	Affective filter	Classroom management	Social objectives	Cognitive engagement	Weight	Rank
Affective filter	1	1.24	1.43	1.51	0.315	1
Classroom management	0.80	1	1.14	1.41	0.263	2
Social objectives	0.69	0.87	1	0.89	0.212	3
Cognitive engagement	0.64	0.70	1.11	1	0.210	4
					IR=0 ≤0.1	

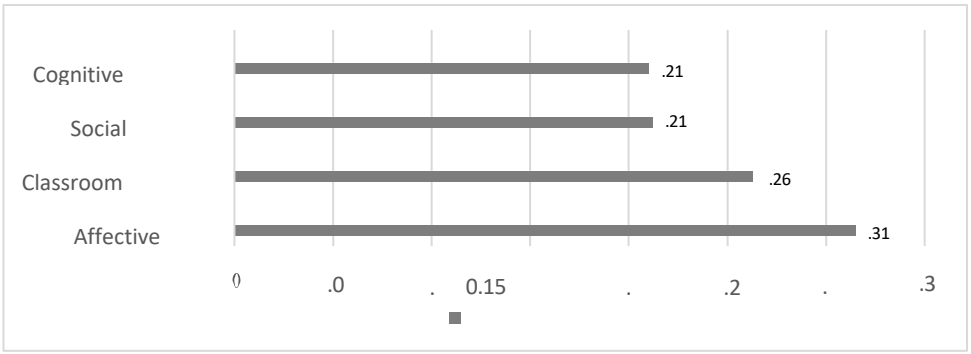


Fig. 2. weights of the main criteria

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The results showed that the affective filter factor with a relative weight of 0.315 was ranked. First, the classroom management factor, with a relative weight of 0.263, was ranked second; the social objective factor, with a relative weight of 0.212, was ranked third; and finally, the cognitive engagement factor, with a relative weight of 0.210, was ranked last. The consistency rate of the desired matrix is equal to 0, and because this value is less than 0.1 (IR≤0.1), in pairwise comparisons, the desired matrix is consistent in the judgment of the experts.

4.4 Calculating the Weight (Local Weight) of Level Two Criteria

The next step was calculating each sub-group's relative weights of the effective sub-criteria. Considering that cognitive engagement criterion had five sub-criteria (meaning comprehension, giving instruction, grammar explanation, error correction, and understanding complex topics), the number of comparisons was equal to:

$$\frac{n(n-1)}{2} = \frac{5(5-1)}{2} = 10$$

Table 2 and Figure 3 show the pairwise comparison matrix of cognitive engagement sub-criteria and the relative weights of each sub-criterion, respectively.

Table 2. The pairwise comparison matrix of cognitive engagement sub-criteria

A	Meaning comprehension	Giving instructions	Grammar-explanation	Error-correction	Understanding difficult topics and concepts	Weight	Rank
Meaning comprehension	1	1.14	1.31	1.08	1.11	0.225	1
Giving instructions	0.87	1	1.03	1.08	1.49	0.215	2
Grammar-explanation	0.75	0.96	1	1.17	1.02	0.194	3
Error-correction	0.92	0.92	0.85	1	1.20	0.193	4
Understanding difficult topics and concepts	0.89	0.66	0.97	0.82	1	0.172	5

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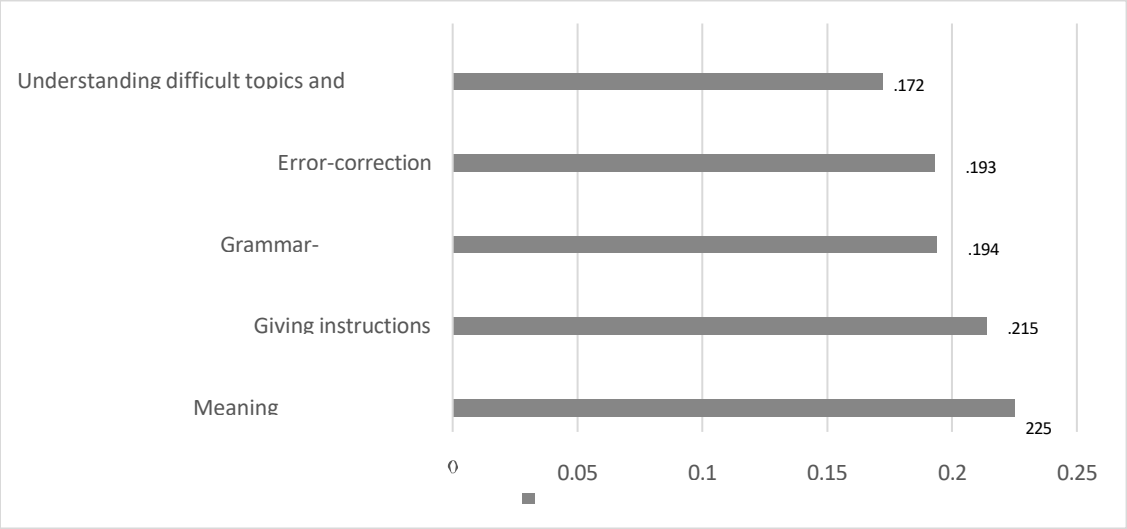


Fig. 3. Relative weights of the cognitive engagement sub-criteria

The calculated results indicated that the meaning comprehension factor with a relative weight of 0.225 was ranked. First, the instruction factor with a relative weight of 0.215 was ranked second, and the grammar explanation factor with a relative weight of

0.194 was ranked third, the error correction factor with a relative weight of 0.193 was ranked fourth, and finally, the factor of understanding complex topics and concepts with a relative weight of 0.172 was ranked last. The consistency rate of the desired matrix is equal to 0.01, and because this value is less than 0.1 (IR≤0.1), in pairwise comparisons, the desired matrix is consistent in the judgment of the experts.Moreover, table 3. and Figure 4. show the pairwise comparison matrix of affective filter sub-criteria and the relative weights of each sub-criterion, respectively. Considering that the affective filter criterion had four sub-criteria (making less tense and morecomfortable atmosphere, inspiring learners, encouraging students to learn more two, and boosting motivation), four the number of

comparisons was equal to: $\frac{n(n-1)}{2} = \frac{4(4-1)}{2} = 6$.

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Table 3. Pairwise comparison matrix of affective filter sub-criteria

B	Making less tense and more confortable atmosphere	Inspiring learners	Encouraging students to learn more	Boosting motivation	Weight	Rank
Making less tense and more comfortable atmosphere	1	1	1.49	2.99	0.343	1
Inspiring learners	1	1	1.30	1.82	0.293	2
Encouraging students to learn more	0.66	0.76	1	1.86	0.232	3
Boosting motivation	0.33	0.54	0.53	1	0.132	4

IR=0.01≤0.1

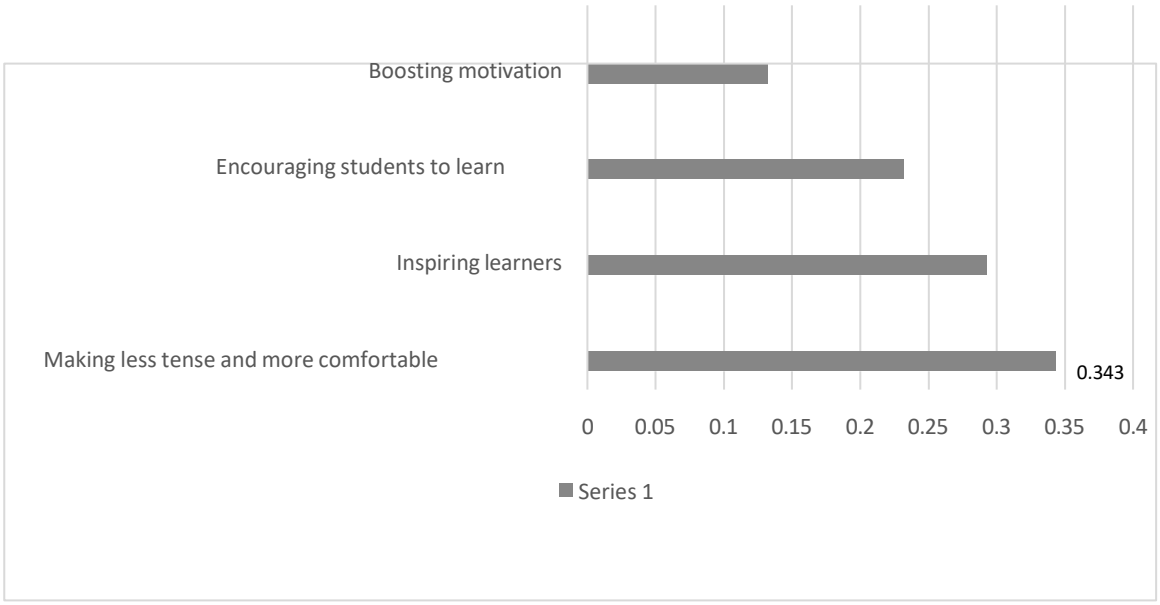


Fig. 4. Relative weights of affective filter sub-criteria

The calculated results showed that the first rank belonged to the making less tense and more comfortable atmosphere factor with a relative weight of 0.343, inspiring learners factor with a relative weight of 0.293 was ranked second, encouraging students to learn more factor was ranked third, with the relative weight of 0.232, and boosting motivation factor with the relative weight of 0.132 was ranked last.

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The consistency rate of the desired matrix is equal to 0.01, and because this value is less than 0.1 (IR≤0.1), in pairwise comparisons, the desired matrix is consistent in the judgment of the experts. Table 4 also shows the pairwise comparison matrix of social objectives sub-criteria, and Figure 5 presents the relative weights of each sub-criterion. Considering that the social objectives criterion had three sub-criteria (increasing interaction flow, socializing of students, and building connections between L1 and TL culture), the number of comparisons was equal to the:

$$\frac{n(n-1)}{2} = \frac{3(3-1)}{2} = 3.$$

Table 4. Pairwise comparison matrix of social objectives sub-criteria

C	Increasing interaction flow	Socializing of students	Building connections between L1 and TL culture	Weight	Rank
Increasing interaction flow	1	1.49	2.93	0.492	1
Socializing of students	0.66	1	2.33	0.349	2
Building connections between L1 and TL culture	0.34	0.42	1	0.158	3
				IR=0≤0.1	

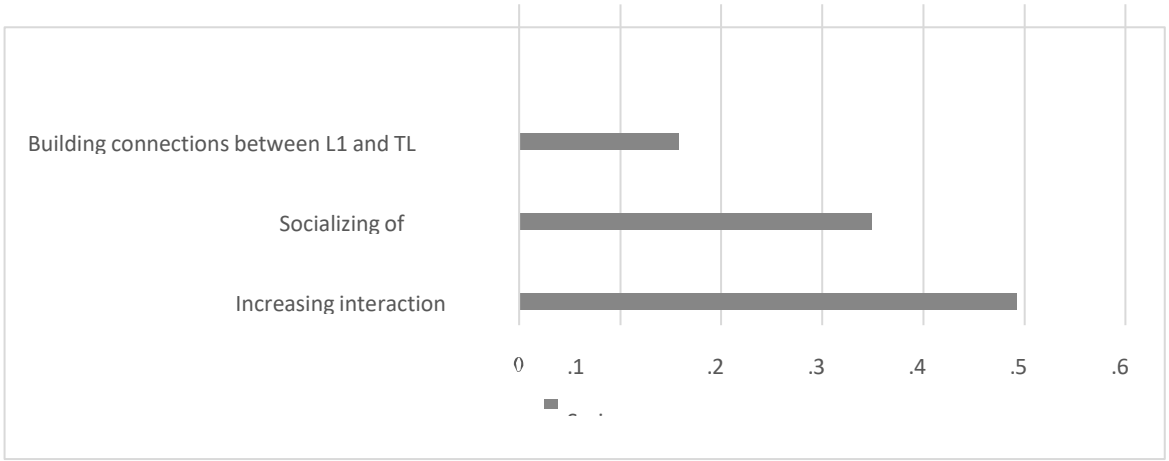


Fig. 5. Relative weights of social objectives sub-criteria

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The calculated results showed that the increasing interaction flow factor was ranked with a relative weight of 0.492. First, the socializing of students, with a relative weight of 0.349, was ranked second, and finally, the factor of building connections between L1 and TL culture, with a relative weight of 0.158, was ranked last. The consistency rate of the desired matrix is equal to 0. Because this value is less than 0.1 (IR≤0.1), in pairwise comparisons, the desired matrix is consistent in the judgment of the experts.

At last, table 5 shows the pairwise comparison matrix of classroom management criteria, and Figure 6 presents the relative weights of each sub-criterion. Considering that classroom management criterion had three sub-criteria (controlling the class,

organizing the class, and saving time), the number of comparisons was equal to: $\frac{n(n-1)}{2} = \frac{3(3-1)}{2} = 3$

Table 5. Pairwise comparison matrix of classroom management sub-criteria

D	Controlling the class	Organizing the class	Saving time	Weight	Rank
Controlling the class	1	1.43	2.82	0.479	1
Organizing the class	0.69	1	2.55	0.356	2
Saving time	0.35	0.39	1	0.156	3

IR=0.01≤0.1

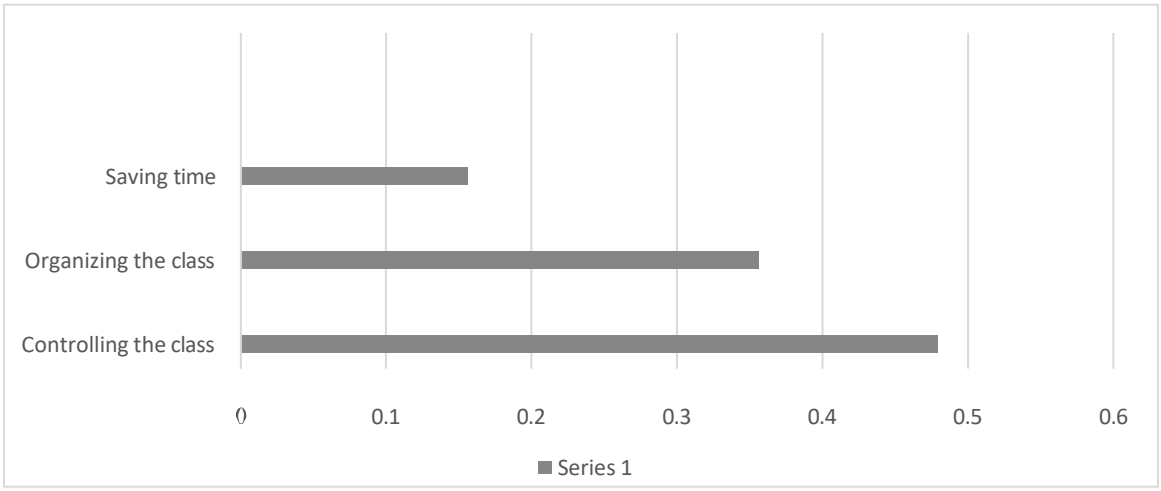


Fig. 6. Relative weights of classroom management sub-criteria

The calculated results showed that the factor of controlling the class obtained the first rank, with a relative weight of

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0.479; the factor of organizing the class was ranked second, with a relative weight of 0.356; and for the last rank, the saving time factor was calculated, with the relative weight of 0.156. The consistency rate of the desired matrix is equal to 0.01. Because this value is less than 0.1 (IR≤0.1), in pairwise comparisons, the desired matrix is consistent in the judgment of the experts.

4.5 Calculating the Final Weight of the Criteria

The Final weight of each group's criteria is calculated by multiplying the local weight of the sub-criteria by the weight of the related main criteria. In Table 5, the final weights and final results of the identified and ranked criteria are presented.

Table 6. Final weight of the criteria

Main criteria	Weight of the main criteria	Sub-criteria	Local weight of the sub-criteria	Final weight	Rank
Cognitive engagement	0.210	Understanding complex topicsGiving instructions	0.172	0.0361	14
			0.215	0.0451	9
		Error correction Grammar explanation Meaning comprehensionBoosting motivation	0.193	0.0405	13
			0.194	0.0407	12
		Inspiring learners	0.225	0.0472	8
Affective filter	0.315	Encouraging students to learn more	0.132	0.0415	10
		Making less tense and more comfortable atmosphere	0.293	0.0922	5
			0.232	0.0730	7
		Building connections between L1 and TL culture	0.343	0.1080	2
Social objectives		Socializing of students Increasing interaction flow Saving time			
		Controlling the class Organizing the class	0.158	0.0334	15
			0.349	0.0739	6
Classroom management	0.212		0.492	0.1043	3
			0.156	0.0410	11
			0.479	0.1259	1
			0.356	0.0936	4
	0.263				

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5. Discussion

The present study addressed two research questions, and this section discusses previous research findings. To answer the first research question, an extensive literature review was conducted to determine the primary reasons for teachers' use of first language (L1) in EFL classrooms. The findings identified four key categories influencing L1 use: (a) cognitive engagement of learners, (b) affective factors impacting the teaching-learning process, (c) social objectives within the classroom, and (d) classroom management purposes. These factors collectively contributed to teachers' decisions to incorporate L1 in their instructional practices, offering a deeper understanding of the rationale behind L1 use in EFL settings.

The findings align with Aminifard and Mehrpour (2019), who observed that Farsi was primarily used to build rapport, maintain discipline, provide instructions, correct spoken errors, explain grammar and vocabulary, clarify meanings, and assess learners. Similarly, the results support Shariati's (2019) argument that teachers utilize Farsi to manage classroom behavior and facilitate understanding of complex grammar concepts.

Furthermore, the study echoes the findings of Davoudi Sharifabad and Kowsary (2020), who reported that Iranian teachers employ Farsi as a pedagogical tool for explaining new and challenging vocabulary, grammatical rules, abstract concepts, homework instructions, and cultural differences. The study also aligns with Mohebbi and Alavi (2014), who found that teachers resort to code-switching to expedite task explanations and reduce time consumption in the classroom.

Additionally, the findings confirm previous research by Alijani and Barjesteh (2018) and Navidinia et al. (2020), which demonstrated that students who taught grammar with judicious use of Farsi outperformed those who received instruction exclusively in English. Lastly, the results support Masoumi and Paramasivam (2021).

Regarding the second research question, ranking the reasons for L1 use in EFL classrooms by teachers, a pairwise questionnaire was employed. The results revealed the rankings of the 15 most important reasons, according to eminent teachers, which are as follows: Using the native language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is a strategic pedagogical tool to enhance students' comprehension and engagement. One of the key ways teachers utilize L1 is for error correction, providing immediate feedback and explicit instruction to help students recognize and rectify their mistakes. This approach ensures that learners understand the nature of their errors and develop a more precise grasp of the target language (L2). Additionally, L1 can be instrumental in explaining complex or abstract concepts. Teachers scaffold students' understanding by offering clear explanations and breaking down intricate ideas into simpler components, making challenging material more accessible. This technique is particularly valuable in the early stages of language acquisition or when introducing new concepts that require deeper cognitive processing.

Beyond linguistic benefits, integrating L1 also helps build connections between students' native language and the cultural aspects of the target language. Teachers can use L1 to draw parallels, compare cultural elements, and contextualize learning experiences, fostering a deeper appreciation of both linguistic and cultural dimensions. These findings align with previous studies, such as those by Burdujan (2022), Ali Tubayqi and Ahmed Al Tale' (2021), and Pratiwi (2019), which highlight L1's role in managing classroom interactions, enhancing student engagement, and facilitating grammar explanations. However, they contrast with Mohammadi et al. (2023), who identified cognitive engagement and pedagogical delivery as the primary justifications for code-switching. To support these findings, it can be argued that L1 use helps lower negative affective filters, promotes socialization through peer interaction, and strengthens classroom management by establishing clear expectations. Paker and Karaağaç (2015) similarly emphasized that while extensive target language use is essential, the occasional incorporation of L1 serves multiple instructional functions. Therefore, a balanced and purposeful use of L1 in EFL classrooms can optimize linguistic and cognitive engagement, ensuring a more effective learning experience.

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6. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify and rank the reasons behind teachers' use of L1 (the first language) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Recognizing the significance of language instruction and the potential impact of L1 use on language learning, this research investigated the factors influencing teachers' decision to incorporate L1 in the EFL classroom setting. By examining and prioritizing these reasons, the study sought to provide insights into the motivations and considerations that inform teachers' use of L1 and contribute to a deeper understanding of its role within the EFL instructional context. Through this investigation, the research aimed to shed light on effective strategies for optimizing language instruction and promoting language learning outcomes in EFL classrooms.

As far as the first research question was concerned, to identify the most critical reasons underlying teachers' use of L1 in EFL classrooms, four inclusive factors were highlighted through investigating the library studies and the literature, which included affective filter, cognitive engagement, classroom management, and social objectives. Based on the results discussed earlier, to answer the second research question related to ranking the reasons behind L1 use by teachers, the findings indicated that the most important reasons were controlling the class, making less tense and more comfortable atmosphere, increasing the interaction flow, organizing the class, inspiring learners, socializing of students, encouraging students to learn more, meaning comprehension, giving instructions, boosting motivation, saving time, grammar explanation, error correction, understanding complex topics, and building connections between L1 and TL culture, respectively.

Generally, the results showed that from the teachers' point of view, the most important reasons to use their mother tongue in EFL classrooms were affective filters, classroom management purposes, social objectives, and cognitively engaging the students. Given the findings, some practical recommendations can be presented. First, by uncovering and ranking the reasons behind the use of L1, this study provides valuable pedagogical insights for EFL teachers. The identified reasons can inform teachers' instructional decisions and guide their use of L1 more intentionally and effectively. Teachers can leverage these insights to enhance teaching practices, optimize language instruction, and facilitate students' language learning experience.

Second, this study offers implications for teacher professional development programs. Understanding the reasons behind using L1 can help inform training and workshops for EFL teachers, enabling them to develop strategies for incorporating L1 judiciously and effectively in their classrooms. Professional development initiatives can focus on providing guidance, support, and training opportunities that enable teachers to leverage the benefits of L1 while promoting target language acquisition.

Third, the implications of this study extend to curriculum design and materials development for EFL classrooms. By identifying the reasons behind using L1, curriculum designers and materials developers can ensure that their resources align with teachers' needs and provide appropriate support for integrating L1 when relevant. This can create more inclusive and learner-centered materials that promote effective language learning.

Fourth, understanding the reasons behind using L1 can also help enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in EFL classrooms. By adopting strategies informed by the ranked reasons, teachers can create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment that caters to students' linguistic needs and promotes active participation. This can contribute to improved motivation, comprehension, and target language acquisition. In sum, these implications highlight the potential impact of this study on EFL teaching practices, teacher professional development, and curriculum design. These findings can contribute to developing practical instructional approaches that optimize language learning experiences in EFL classrooms.

There were some limitations and delimitations for the study because of the situation and circumstances under which the study was conducted. There are as follows: Regarding the limitations of the study, it can be said that convenience sampling was used in the present study. The findings and conclusions may be limited to the specific context of EFL classrooms in Iran. They may not be directly applicable to other educational settings or countries, weakening the generalizability of the results. Also, the study may have limitations regarding the number of participants, which may impact the generalizability of the result. A smallsample size may not fully represent all EFL teachers' diverse perspectives and practices in Iran. To mention another

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limitation, the study assumed that the participants had a certain level of proficiency in both the target language (English) and their first language (Farsi), which may haveinfluenced their decisions and use of L1 in the classroom. Variations in language proficiency among participants may have affected the outcomes. Another limitation is that the data collected fromthe questionnaires may be subject to biases related to self-reporting, such as social desirability bias, where participants may have presented responses they believed were expected or socially acceptable. The cultural factors being the other limitation, the reasons behind the use of L1 in EFLclassrooms by teachers in Iran may be influenced by cultural aspects and specific educational policies or traditions in Iran, which may not apply to other cultural contexts.

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