English Language Teachers' Perceptions of Using Students' First Language in English as a Foreign Language Classrooms

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated EFL teachers' perceptions regarding students' first language (Amharic) use in English classroom. A mixed methods study, utilizing quantitative data in the form of a Likert-scale questionnaire and qualitative data through semi-structured interview, was used for this study. Data were collected from 59 EFL teachers (all involved in the questionnaire and four out of them were interviewed) in four selected secondary schools. The study employed descriptive and thematic analysis for the questionnaire items and interview questions respectively. Findings revealed that the great majority of teachers were in favor of using Amharic while teaching English. They also acknowledged the potential benefits and expressed their concerns about drawbacks of L1 (Amharic) in English instruction. Contextual factors like students' level of proficiency in English, deficiency of teacher training on L1 use and somehow teachers' inadequate proficiency in English were among the elicited determining reasons as to how they perceive and apply L1 in classroom. In light of these findings, recommendations were made for teacher educators and EFL teachers themselves towards harnessing the potential of L1 in English classes.

Keywords: Perception; EFL teachers; L1; EFL classes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

These days, English serving as a global lingua franca unlocks entry to educational and professional opportunities worldwide. As a result, there is an overwhelming desire to learn English as a foreign (or second) language. This endeavor drives teachers and researchers in the field of English language teaching to find and apply various pedagogical techniques that can improve students' learning of English [1]. Of these, the use of students' native language or mother tongue (L1) is a crucial aspect of English teaching.

The issue of utilizing first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom had been a subject of ongoing debate and research for decades. The field of EFL teaching largely held a monolingual stance supported by teaching methods like Direct Method, theories of second language acquisition such as Krashen [2] advocating zero or minimal L1 use and believing that its use may impede target language acquisition (in this case English). However, recent research has re-examined the potential benefits of incorporating L1, highlighting its role in facilitating comprehension, building rapport, managing classroom discipline, and promoting learning [3,4,5]. To shed light on this complex and multifaceted issue, this study investigated teachers' perceptions regarding L1 use as their beliefs and practices ultimately shape classroom dynamics.

Utilizing students' L1 in English language classrooms remains a complex and often debated topic in Ethiopia too, with a divergence of opinions among EFL teachers. In the context of Ethiopia, English is taught as a foreign language and is used alongside Amharic as a working language in some organizations. English is taught as a subject from grades one to twelve, and serves as a medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher education institutions of Ethiopia. Students encounter problems while communicating in English as they have little or no exposure to use the language in the outside classroom environment. It is only the classroom and the English language teacher used as a place and speech community where English is practiced by students. In this regard, the most widely used language in Amhara region especially in Bahir Dar is Amharic. Thus, students in Bahir Dar city share it as their L1.

In the case of Ethiopia, several studies were conducted in relation to L1 use in EFL classes. To illustrate some, Yigzaw and Beshir's [6]

survey research investigated the purpose, frequency, and application, of using Amharic on elementary school (specially, Grade 8) teachers and students. In this regard, it was reported that 80% of teachers and 61.5% of students favored the use of Amharic. The teachers were, however, practically observed over-using Amharic. Moreover, Yigzaw [7] conducted an experimental study to see the impact of L1 on Grade 11 students' writing in English classes. The post-test content results unveiled the experimental group's outperformance over the comparison group, and the interviewed students showed their preference of using L1 to discuss ideas in the pre-writing stages of English writing. What is more, a descriptive research by Faltamo [8] aimed at examining teachers' practices and students' perceptions of using L1. Regarding the findings, teachers used Amharic for different purposes and students felt comfortable at times of L1 use. My study is different from that of Faltamo [8] where the participants are students who speak Amharic as a second language.

My teaching experience informs me that EFL teachers do have diverging views regarding the role of L1 in English classrooms. However, dearth of local research has addressed this phenomenon. In this regard, local research pertaining to teachers' perceptions of using students' L1 in English classes, especially in secondary school level and with students sharing the same L1 is worth conducting. In light of these scenarios, it provides a rich context to explore teachers' perceptions of students' L1 use in EFL classroom for Grades 9-12 as understanding those perceptions is a crucial element to inform language-teaching practices. Therefore, to examine the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding L1 use, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the use of students' L1 in EFL classes?
2. At what specific contexts or situations do teachers perceive L1 use is more or less beneficial?
3. What are the teachers' perceived benefits and drawbacks of using L1 in English classes?

1.1 Research Hypotheses

1. EFL teachers hold positive perceptions of using students' L in English classrooms.

2. EFL teachers perceive L1 use as beneficial in a wide range of contexts or situations.
3. EFL teachers will mention the benefits and possible drawbacks of using L1 in English classrooms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Use of Students' L1 in EFL Classrooms

The literature on the use of students' L1 in EFL classes is multifaceted, and numerous scholars are devoted to the field. L1 use in L2 classroom, a universal phenomenon during Grammar Translation Method (GMT), was challenged and this led to the emergence of Monolingual (English-only) approach because of Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching [9]. This approach, however, was not free from criticism, so it started to be challenged [9]. Thus, a growing number of language experts and instructors started to support the use of L1 in L2 classes. Cook [10] claims that it may be effective to resort to students L1 in EFL classroom in such reasons as keeping discipline, administering tests, and many others. Ellis [11] also recognizes the power of students' L1 use in that it makes them active learners and it shapes the conceptualization of their learning.

Cummins's [12] 'interdependence hypothesis' draws the foundation for this study on using L1 in English classroom. This hypothesis assumes that second language competence is a function of first language competence at the time of exposure to the second language [13]. The sociocultural framework, emphasizing learning as a collaborative dialogue, values the potential of first language in scaffolding the dialogue [11]. Indeed, students' prior knowledge (of L1) can promote optimal learning in L2. Students' L1 can enable them to develop L2 proficiency when they receive instruction in both L1 and L2, hence achieving fluency in both languages (Bruen & Kelly, 2017).

Various contextual factors influence teachers' perceptions of using L1 in or avoiding form L2 classes, for example, when EFL learners do not share the same L1 and the teacher does not speak their first language [14]. This is not, however, the case right now as there are an extensive array of classes with teachers and students sharing the same L1. In this regard, cook [15] posits that students with the same first language can employ it during group work or pair work in English classroom. In addition, EFL students with low-level proficiency in English may need the help of their L1, as supported by Alshehri [14] and Luitel et al. [16]. Therefore, students' first language is viewed as a resource, not a problem and it plays a meditational role in L2 classes [16]. It is stated, "Using the students' L1 in education means developing bilingualism that provides intellectual, cultural, and social resources (pp. 247)". Moreover, Hassane [9] insists that L1 should be seen as an effective source that can be employed to improve learners' foreign language skills.

2.2 Arguments against L1 Use

There are advocates of an English-only-policy to apply in EFL classes. This emanates from the second language acquisition theory of Krashen [2] that target language learning and teaching should take place excluding the use of students' L1. For example, they contend that students develop overreliance on their L1 once they are aware the teacher uses it, and it results in students with limited exposure to English. They also reject L1 use justifying that it discourages students' peer interaction [17]. Moreover, proponents of monolingual approach assume that student-to-student communication in the target language may be limited due to teachers' excessive explanations via students' L1. Therefore, teachers and students should use the target language as a sole medium of communication in the classroom [9].

2.3 Arguments for L1 Use

The English-only policy proponents are challenged by various educators and researchers emphasizing the potentials benefits of incorporating students' L1 in specific contexts of EFL classes. Recently, there has been a call for viewing students' L1 as an effective linguistic resource in foreign language teaching, which in turn can speed up the process of acquiring the target language [18]. When EFL teachers employ students' L1, it facilitates comprehension. For, example, it helps the teachers to clarify complex concepts and vocabulary [3]. Cook [10] argues that the word-stores of the L1 and the target language are tightly linked; L2 words are always related to L1 words which means L2 store depends on L1 store. This indicates the crucial role of L1 to learn target language vocabulary. In addition, Saruwatashi [19] posits that teachers' use of L1 helps students' to build rapport and positive classroom climate. First language use improves student engagement and participation,

fostering a more relaxed and supportive learning environment.

Moreover, L1 use promotes cognitive development in the learning of L2 [18]. Using students' L1 enhances metalinguistic knowledge and awareness in L2 learners, and acts as a bridge [13] for developing critical thinking skills in relation to both languages. Furthermore, L1 use serves to support affective learning. Brevik & Rindal [20] discuss that allowing any language resource during language instruction may reflect authentic language use. This helps students to feel their first language has a place in the target language classroom. Alshehri [14] stated, "The avoidance of learner L1 is practically impossible, especially with monolingual students and students with low-level English language proficiency". In such circumstances, Cook [5] suggests that teachers should use their students' first language if they do have at least some knowledge of it.

2.4 Studies on Teachers' Perceptions of Students' L1 Use

A considerable number of studies investigated teachers' perceptions in relation to students' L1 use in the teaching of a certain target language [14,21,22,16,3], Orfan, 2023; [4,23]. The result of these studies revealed how EFL teachers view the role of students' L1 in EFL classes.

Alshehri [14], for example, conducted a mixed methods research on 104 EFL teachers (and five for interview) from different countries, and the results showed that 90% held positive views about L1 use, but suggesting English to be the main language in the class. In another mixed methods research, Suhayati [4] employed questionnaire and semi-structure interview to see the attitudes of teachers and the functions to use L1 in English classes. It was indicated that teachers were in favor of L1 use mainly for its purpose as tool of teaching and classroom management. Using a survey questionnaire and classroom observation, Orfan (2023) also examined EFL instructors' perceptions and found they viewed L1 both as facilitator (e.g. building students' lexicon) and as interfering of English learning. Calling for L1 use more in lower levels than in higher levels, the participants recommended teachers to use L1 judiciously to facilitate students' learning of English.

In a different approach, a quantitative research carried out by Hasrina et al. [22] depicted teachers' tendency to use L1 assuming its function for explaining new words, making students feel comfortable and confident and improving students' motivation to learn English. It was, however, cautioned that excessive use L1 should not be allowed as it might limit students' exposure to the target language. Similarly, Al Asmari [24] employed a questionnaire aiming at investigating 100 EFL teachers' viewpoints of L1 use in the context of Saudi Universities, and the results disclosed the participants' positive perceptions towards the use of L1 but suggesting a careful use of L1. Another study by Burat and Cavusoglu [21] administered a questionnaire and found that most of the teachers were reluctant (hesitant) as for the use of L1 in target language classes.

A qualitative study by Luitel et al. [16] exploring EFL teachers' views of Nepali (as L1) indicated teachers' experiences of using the L1 for its cognitive roles. The findings also signified that L1 should be used "among the students having poor level of competence in English" (p.250). Using an ethnographic study, Ölmez and Kirkgöz [25] too examined teachers' beliefs towards L1 use and their purposes to use it. The findings divulged teachers' views of L1 use as beneficial, and it was highlighted that students' affective and cognitive needs are the reasons behind using L1. What is more, a qualitative case study by Bruen and Kelly (2017), in an endeavor to see the attitudes of Irish lecturers pertaining to the use of L1, revealed the participants' strong support for L1 (German) as a pedagogical tool for reducing cognitive overload and learner anxiety. Above all, the findings of all these studies pertaining to L1 use in English classes tell us that teachers are predominantly of the opinion that L1 is an essential resource to be utilized in English classrooms, but some teachers still showing their concerns about the downsides of L1 in EFL classroom.

3. METHODOLOGY

In an endeavor to find out English language teachers' perceptions of using students' first language in English classrooms, descriptive study was used. It elucidated data on what EFL teachers perceive and do regarding the use of Amharic in various aspects of English lessons. This study employed mixed methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions by combining quantitative and qualitative data sources.

Table 1. Teachers' demographic information

Teaching Experience				Education level		First Language			Sex	
1-10	11-15	16-20	20 and above	Degree	Masters	Amharic	Tigrigna	Awign	Male	Female
7	15	21	16	39	20	52	2	5	42	17

3.1 Population and Sampling

In Bahir Dar city (found in Amhara region, Ethiopia), there are about 21 secondary schools where 11 of them are state and the rest 10 are private schools. This study adopted stratified random sampling [26] in which government and private schools have equal chance of being represented in the study. So all the schools were divided into two strata i.e. state and private, and two schools from each stratum (n=4) were randomly selected as target participants. While two schools (Ghion and Tana Haik) were selected from government schools, Millennium and Eshet Academy represented the private schools. All EFL teachers in four schools (n=59) who were teaching English as a foreign language for students from the same first language (Amharic) were taken as participants to respond to the questionnaire for this study. For the interview session, however, only four teachers from the total of 59 participants were chosen using stratified random sampling to give the same opportunity for the two strata (two from government and two from private schools). This is because incorporating all questionnaire respondents into the interview session was not manageable.

3.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used for this study; namely, questionnaire and semi-structure interview. Adapted from Alshehri [14], Orfan (2023), Suhayati [4], and reviewed from the existing literature in the field, the questionnaire consisted of five-point Likert-scale items that were intended to examine teachers' views and experiences regarding L1 use in EFL classes. This Likert-scale questionnaire was employed to measure teachers' perception of L1 use with the range as follows: Strongly disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). More specifically, it was employed to collect relevant data teachers' perceptions of L1 usefulness, preferred contexts for L1 use, and perceived benefits and drawbacks.

Additionally, semi-structured interview that comprised of some pre-specified (but open-ended) questions at hand was employed. During the interview, those guiding questions were accompanied by subsequent follow up questions to help the researcher delve deeper into teachers' perceptions, exploring their rationale for particular stances and eliciting detailed accounts of their classroom practice regarding their L1 use. The interviews were audio recorded for analysis purpose in the study.

3.3 Reliability and Validity of Instruments

Cronbach Alpha was used to check the internal consistency of items in the questionnaire. And the calculated Cronbach alpha scale showed 0.716, which is ideally acceptable according to Pallant [27]. In addition, each question had to be checked to address validity issue such as whether all items were understandable and appropriate for the target audience. In line with this, my colleagues were involved to observe and comment on the appropriateness of questionnaire items. This resulted in the reduction of some unnecessary phrases and rewording of ambiguous ideas so that the questionnaire becomes clear and easily comprehensible to the participants.

4. RESULTS

To analyze the questionnaire, the items were first divided into four sections. The first section was about teachers' general perceptions of Amharic in English classes while section 2 dealt with specific situations teachers use Amharic. Section 3 included items on perceived benefits of Amharic in English class, and the last section focused on potential drawbacks of Amharic in English classroom. Hence, the questionnaire data consisted of four tables.

For the sake of analysis, 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' are described as one since they both show negative perception while 'agree' and 'strongly agree' reveal positive perception. In addition, 'neutral' refers to those remaining hesitant, or holding neither of the views.

4.1 Results of the Questionnaire

As table 2 shows, the vast majority of teachers (98.3%) believed that Amharic should be used in English classroom, even suggesting teachers employ Amharic to support their teaching of English. Again, the above-mentioned numbers of teachers stated they comfortably use Amharic to help students' learning of English. In the same vein, 98.3% of teachers had confidence that using Amharic facilitates English language learning and teaching. In general, this shows EFL teachers' positive perceptions regarding Amharic use in English classes.

It is displayed in Table 3 that 98.3% of the teachers claimed they used Amharic when explaining grammar rules and defining vocabulary items, while 88.1% responded they use Amharic at the time of clarifying instructions for activities. In addition, 88.1% of teachers employed Amharic when reacting to questions raised by students. To manage classroom behaviors, nearly all teachers (98.3%) utilized Amharic in EFL classes. This table reveals that overwhelming majority of teachers make use of Amharic in various specific contexts or situations.

Table 4 discloses the degree of agreement in terms of teachers' perceived benefits of L1 in English classes. Accordingly, Amharic was used by absolute majority of teachers (88.3%) for explaining difficult concepts. Teachers (94.9%) also used Amharic to provide their students with emotional support (e.g. reducing anxiety) and to build rapport or relationship with them although 5.1% of respondents go against such function of L1. Again, 91.5% of the respondents perceived the role of L1 (Amharic) in facilitating interaction in English. Nevertheless, 5.1% of teachers felt neutral regarding the role of Amharic in providing emotional support and building rapport with students. Largely, teachers admitted the potential benefits of Amharic for a wide range of reasons in EFL classroom.

Table 2. Teachers' general perceptions of L1 use (Amharic)

Items	N	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' first language (Amharic) should be used in English classroom.	59		1.7	32.2	66.1	4.64	.517
Teachers should use their students' first language (Amharic) too while teaching English.	59		1.7	54.2	44.1	4.42	.532
I feel comfortable when using Amharic to help my students learning of English.	59	1.7		27.1	71.2	4.68	.571
Using Amharic can facilitate English language learning and teaching.	59	1.7		49.2	49.2	4.46	.597

Table 3. Situations teachers use L1

Items	N	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
I use Amharic when explaining grammar rules.	59	1.7		45.8	52.5	4.49	.598
I use Amharic when providing vocabulary definitions.	59	1.7		61.0	37.3	4.34	.576
I use Amharic when clarifying instructions for activities.	59		11.9	64.4	23.7	4.12	.590
I use Amharic when responding to student questions.	59	3.4	8.5	62.7	25.4	4.10	.687
I use Amharic when managing classroom behavior.	59		1.7	44.1	54.2	4.53	.537

Table 4. Teachers' perceived benefits of L1

Items	N	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Using Amharic in English class helps to explain difficult concepts.	59	1.7		45.8	52.5	4.49	.598
Using Amharic helps me to provide emotional support (to avoid anxiety).	59		5.1	71.2	23.7	4.19	.508
Amharic use enables me to build rapport or relationship with students.	59		5.1	83.1	11.9	4.07	.410
Using Amharic also facilitates communication and interaction in English.	59	1.7	6.8	72.9	18.6	4.08	.566

Table 5. Perceived drawbacks of L1

Items	N	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Amharic use in English class limits/hinders English language learning.	59	37.3	57.6	3.4	1.7		1.69	.623
Amharic usage in English class develops overreliance or dependence on L1 on students.	59	1.7	32.2	64.4		1.7	2.68	.600
Using Amharic reduces opportunities to practice English.	59	40.7	54.2	3.4	1.7		1.66	.633

A large number of teachers (88.1%) were not of the opinion that using Amharic in English classes hinders language learning, with 3.4% remaining hesitant to agree or disagree. However, 8.5% of the respondents were convinced about the hindrance of L1 on target language learning. Amazingly, a greater number of participants (64.4%) became reluctant about whether or not students, when using Amharic in English classes, develop overreliance on it. However, 33.9% of teachers responded against the statement, with only 1.7% admitting the downside of Amharic in terms of creating overreliance. Moreover, a vast majority of respondents (94.9%) did not feel that Amharic reduces the opportunity to practice English although 3.4% show hesitancy and 1.7% tend to agree. From this table, it can be understood that using Amharic was not perceived by greater number of teachers to have downsides on English language learning.

4.2 Results of the Interview Questions

In addition to the questionnaire, data were collected from four EFL teachers (hereafter, T1, T2, T3, T4) using semi-structured interview questions. Accordingly, they were asked to describe their general views about using Amharic in English classroom. Surprisingly, all teachers were of the opinion that using Amharic in English classes is one teaching strategy they use. They could not deny that Amharic aids the learning and teaching of English. For example:

T2: I see Amharic use as one technique for teaching English. But some teachers ignore it because they think that using only English is a quality of good teaching. For me, Amharic helps students to understand well

T4: This is a topic of discussion by some teachers like me, but arguing for the use of Amharic. Most of us do not have awareness about using mother tongue when teaching English. We were not trained how to treat mother tongue. So we do what we believe.

Concerning the second question, dealing with situations Amharic use is appropriate, EFL teachers mentioned contexts in which they feel

Amharic use is necessary. These include when students are in trouble and do not understand me (T1), when giving instructions and facing unfamiliar words (T2), when the class is silent (T3), and when explaining grammar aspects (T4). In this regard, Teacher 1 & 3 cautioned against using Amharic frequently in English. To quote their words,

> **T1:** *We should not use Amharic regularly; we need to select right times Amharic is necessary.*

> **T3:** *By the way, I use Amharic in some cases, not always. When the class is silent, I use Amharic to make laughter, to check their understandings and to initiate interaction.*

Regarding the third question, the participant teachers were asked to list benefits of using Amharic in English classes. Various pedagogical functions that Amharic serves were revealed by the teachers as follow: to reduce the students' level of anxiety at difficult times (T1), to build intimacy with students and to translate challenging English concepts (T2), to create good classroom environment (T3), to clarify grammar points and define new words (T4). T2 added:

> *Students' knowledge of Amharic helps them to learn English well.*

A worth noting point in this section (raised by T2) is that some EFL teachers are observed using Amharic due to their inadequate proficiency in English. Sometimes, it may be difficult for them to use English all the time, and using Amharic becomes a way of getting relief at times of challenge for teachers too. T3 also shared this idea:

> *Sometimes, it is seen teachers using Amharic due to their inability to express their ideas in English.*

The fourth question was about whether using Amharic in English class may have disadvantages/drawbacks. Three of the four teachers raised nearly the same concern that (despite its benefits) Amharic use may develop tendency of high dependence on and over use of it, which may result in consuming time and minimizing the students' practice and understanding in English. Uniquely, T4 raised the inability of Amharic in expressing what we need due to structural difference between Amharic and English. He claimed this way: "First, it does not express all English ideas very well. For example,

Amharic and English have no similar structure. Amharic – SOV and English - SVO."

The final interview question elicited what EFL teachers would like to share about the use of Amharic in English classroom. They gave credit to L1 (Amharic) for its multiple functions in English teaching at the same time warning about its likely disadvantages and recommending for limited use of Amharic in necessary situations. Here are some excerpts below.

> **T1:** *It is not good to use Amharic always; English should be used mostly. So, Amharic is supporter.*

> **T4:** *Amharic is an important tool; we should use it properly to help our students. If we reject it, our teaching will be fruitless. And if we use too much, it consumes the time to teach English. So we should be in between and use it systematically.*

As a new finding, this study disclosed teachers' lack of competence in English and deficiency of teacher training regarding L1 use as factors determining whether to use Amharic in English classes. In addition, some teachers' beliefs that a good teacher uses only English can determine their practices as well.

5. DISCUSSION

The data being collected through questionnaire and interview, the findings were triangulated to get comprehensible picture of teachers' perceptions on L1 use. Surprisingly, the great majority (98.3%) of teachers held positive perceptions towards using their students' L1 (Amharic) in English classes. Exactly the same percentage of participants admitted they use Amharic in various circumstances like explaining grammar rules, providing vocabulary definitions, and managing classroom behavior. Again, another large proportion of participants agreed they use Amharic when clarifying instructions for activities and when responding to student questions. With reference to perceived benefits and drawbacks of Amharic in English classes, a vast majority of teachers acknowledged several benefits of Amharic although some teachers (8.5%) showed their concern of Amharic as hindering English language learning.

The results of this study appeared in harmonious with previous studies on the issue. As is true for this study, Alshehri's (2017) research findings depicted great majority of EFL teachers' position

in favor of L1 use in English classes. This study's findings also align with that of Orfan (2023) in that although L1 plays facilitative role, it may also interfere L2 learning. In contrary, this study differs from the study of Burat and Cavusoglu (2023) that depicted the majority of teachers' reluctant position towards the role of L1.

The findings of this study made alignments with other research results in terms of possible contexts in which students' L1 is necessary. Hasrina et al (2018) findings, for instance, depicted the function of L1 in terms of defining new words. This is in line with the argument of Cook (2016) that L1 serves for vocabulary purpose. Moreover, Luitel et al (2023) found the facilitative role of L1 during the learning of target language vocabulary. Importantly, the role of L1 was acknowledged to play during giving instructions, clarifying difficult concepts, checking students' understanding of target language learning, etc. (Ölmez & Kirkgöz, 2021).

As for the benefits, the findings of this study supported those of previous results that L1 serves as a valuable tool for teaching (Suhayati, 2018), managing classroom (Ölmez & Kirkgöz, 2021), defining new words (Hasrina et al, 2018; Nanda, 2021), building rapport with students (Saruwatashi, 2020). Furthermore, L1 plays cognitive roles such as checking learners' understanding and using L1 knowledge for L2 learning (Luitel et al, 2023). Regarding teachers' concerns of L1 use, the study found students high dependence and over use of it as possible drawbacks, as was one of the findings in Hasrina et al (2018). Largely, the findings in this study align with numerous previous research results in that EFL teachers recognize the facilitative role of L1 in English classes.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the complexity of language teaching when it comes to investigating EFL teachers' perceptions of using students' first language. The study portrayed the great majority of EFL teachers' positive perceptions of using Amharic in English classes, to some extent showing reservations about possible downsides of L1. This investigation calls for a shift in perceptions from unbending "English-only" approach to a balanced line considering various contexts to apply L1. This study gives valuable insights and can inform pedagogical functions that incorporating students' L1 plays a decisive role in English classes. An optimal and careful

employment of L1 is considered appropriate to enhance English language teaching and learning.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawn on the findings of this study, it can be recommended that teacher educators should make EFL teachers well equipped on how to treat students' first language, towards the incorporation of L1 for their students' effective learning of English. This study also recommends EFL teachers to reexamine their perceptions and reshape their practices taking into account the significant role L1 plays in terms of pedagogic functions and classroom management. It should be included as one teaching resource in EFL classroom to serve for mediating English language learning and teaching. Instead of holding an extremist position (either rejecting or over using) about the role of L1, an eclectic (balanced) approach of thoughts and practice of L1 is suggested helpful to aid English language learning and teaching.

Ethical Approval and Consent:
Throughout the process, a research is supposed to ensure ethical considerations. Before collecting data, written consent was obtained from the participants. To make sure the rights and welfares of participants in this study are respected, they were not asked to write their names in the questionnaire and their answers were kept confidential. Moreover, interview participants were given pseudonyms in the analysis (e.g. Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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