

## **Role of mother tongue use in foreign language classroom**

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### **Abstract:**

There is not the unanimity among EFL teachers about total mother tongue (L1) removal from the language classroom. While some researchers claim that the mother tongue should be banned in foreign language classrooms, others consider that it makes a valuable contribution to the learning process. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of L1 use in EFL classroom and the advisable situations when to use it in the classroom. Sixty-three English teachers working in different schools in the Republic of Moldova participated in the study. The perceptions on L1 use were measured through a questionnaire given to teachers. The data revealed that L1 has a mediating role in the language teaching and learning process and there were no inflexible opinions that L1 must not be used in EFL classrooms. That means that EFL teachers don't oppose to L1 use of mother tongue at their classes. Moreover, they believe that it can be effective in several advised situations at the right time. There are much more advantages than disadvantages to L1 use. Despite the advantages, the overusing of L1 in EFL classrooms should be avoided because it causes less L2 use and the dependence of their mother tongue.

**Keywords:** use of the mother tongue (L1), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), teachers' perceptions, EFL classroom.

### **1. Introduction**

The mother tongue is the first language that a child learns automatically and naturally before any other language. It is learnt at home from birth during childhood. As the world becomes increasingly globalized, knowledge of at least one foreign language is now perhaps the most useful real-world skill. According to the National Curriculum for Primary Education in Republic of Moldova, the study of foreign language I is compulsory from the second grade. The document states that there should be a correlation of linguistic metalanguage acquired at mother tongue classes and EFL classes across all EFL learning stages by using intuitive approach. (Guțu I., Curriculum, 2018) The curriculum also mentions several teaching/learning situations at EFL classroom in which the mother tongue use is inevitable, especially when both the teacher and the student have the same L1. The transfer process of linguistic material should be done based on the active vocabulary, according to the needs of comprehension and speaking activities, in full accordance with the terminology learned at the mother tongue classes. The coordination of educational content of EFL classes will consider close school subjects at all

levels of study, especially with the mother tongue classes and other foreign language classes. Most of the terms (e.g., grammar ones) should be taught by correlation with those of the mother tongue, or other foreign language. Therefore, the issue if the mother tongue has its place in EFL lessons, or it should be banned while children learn a foreign language is an important one.

Different teaching methods had varied, and even opposite, attitudes towards mother tongue use in EFL classroom from outright prohibition to its free use during the classes. So, on the one hand its use was strictly prohibited when such teaching methods as Direct Method and Audio-lingual Method were used; on the other hand, it was used extensively during Grammar-Translation Method. The “English-only” classroom policy preserved by many teachers seems to lose its grounds. The encouragement on the part of teachers to use L2 as the only means of interaction in EFL classroom contradicts the accepted practices in English language teaching.

The Communicative Method in the long run has become an umbrella term for various methods which consider the communication as the basic function of language. Although, it presumes that there should be no use of mother tongue in EFL classroom, nowadays there is the lack of unanimity among EFL teachers as for the use of L1 in EFL teaching process. The EFL teachers cannot avoid the mother tongue use while teaching and learning. The key issue of this research is the need to set some precise benchmarks on this regard.

## **2. Research purpose and objectives**

The main purpose of this research is to provide practical recommendations followed by a reasoned list of learning situations when mother tongue use is recommended, so that EFL teachers could rely on it in their classroom activities.

The objective was to identify the learning situations in which the EFL teachers use mother tongue at their classes.

This study aims to answer the following questions: how often EFL teachers use their mother tongue in their classes of English; identify the learning situations in which EFL teachers use their mother tongue (from the list advised by the research); if there are other (not listed) learning situation(s) when EFL teachers use their mother tongue; which language skill is most suitable for the use of the mother tongue; if the mother tongue should be allowed, limited to some advised situations, or banned.

## **3. Methodology**

In this research, the use of mother tongue in EFL classes has been analyzed and discussed. The purpose of the present paper is to find out to what extent the English teachers in the Republic of Moldova use the mother tongue in the EFL classes.

A questionnaire was distributed to the teachers from different parts of Republic of Moldova from March till November 2021. The respondents were 63 English teachers working in different schools in the Republic of Moldova. The questionnaire was given during several sessions of continuing education courses offered at the Tiraspol State University, Republic of

Moldova. The EFL teachers had to provide their perceptions on using their mother tongue in their classrooms.

The first part of the questionnaire included teachers' name, educational institution, and the place where they have been working as a teacher. The second part of the questionnaire aimed to explore the perceptions of the teachers on using their mother tongue in EFL classrooms. The first question asked how often EFL teachers use their mother tongue in their classes of English. There was one of the four following options to choose: always, often, sometimes, never. The second question aimed to identify the learning situations in which EFL teachers use their mother tongue (more than one answer was possible). The options were: a. to explain abstract words, b. translation exercises, c. to manage serious conflicts, d. to explain errors, e. to check students understanding, f. to give instructions, g. to save time, h. to explain difficult grammar rules, i. other situations. In the third question, teachers had to name other (not listed) learning situation(s) when they use their mother tongue (open question); The fourth question inquired which language skill is most suitable for the use of the mother tongue. The options to choose were grammar, vocabulary, reading, or speaking; And the last question was about the frequency of the mother tongue use during English classes. That means, the use of the mother tongue during English classes should be never used, limited and reasonable, or used as much as possible.

#### **4.1. Use of mother tongue in EFL teaching process**

Throughout history, some methods encouraged L1 use, and some did not. Larsen-Freeman (1986) had given a detailed description of the Grammar Translation Method which highly encouraged and depended heavily on the use of L1. Instructions were given in the first language. All the vocabulary and texts were immediately translated into the first language. Learners had to memorize grammar rules. All communication and interactions between learners and teacher were almost entirely in L1. Students' success depended very much on how good they did translation exercises from English into L1. The Grammar Translation Method had been used for centuries before other methods were implemented. Nowadays, many EFL teachers keep on using this method at their classes. The excessive use of L1, seems uncommunicative, boring, pointless, and irrelevant for students (Harmer, 2001).

Direct Method is one of the methods that banned using the first language in EFL classes. This method expects the teachers to use different objects e.g., realia or pictures. L1 was not used at all in the classroom. Teachers answered the questions of the learners through demonstration, explain and teach to think in target language. Translation exercises were given up. Grammar was taught in an inductive way, which means that examples are presented first, so students had to guess the grammar rules from the examples provided by the teacher.

Other methods such as Audio-Lingual approach, did not encourage the L1 use, but accepted its use to make language learning more efficient. This method provides a secure environment and encourages students' initiative and autonomy. Thus, students' role becomes vital for leaning a new language. The teacher provides support if self-correction fails. The aim of L1 use is to provide a bridge from the unfamiliar to the familiar. If necessary, the teacher may give equivalents in mother tongue of the target language words. This solution makes the

meanings of unfamiliar words clear and allows students to feel semantic subtleties of two languages.

Although most EFL teachers are non-native, there is not the unanimity among them about total L1 removal from the language classroom. (Harbord, 1992) So, the complete ban of the students' mother tongue in the language classroom is often viewed skeptically. EFL teachers who strongly believe that the learners' L1 shouldn't be used in the classroom are advocates of the so-called 'Monolingual Approach'; other ones who use L1 judiciously in their EFL classrooms follow the 'Bilingual approach'. In the 'globalized' world we live nowadays the monolingual education seems outdated. Or the practice of imposing only one language is more and more discouraged (Garcia and Sylvan, 2011).

Using L1 in foreign language classrooms is discouraged by advocates of the L2-only position (Chaudron, 1988; Krashen, 1982; Macdonald, 1993). These researchers consider that learners must be exposed to a considerable amount of EFL input to develop better EFL proficiency. The advocate of the monolingual approach, Krashen thinks that learners acquire foreign languages following mostly the same stages they acquire their mother tongue. It means that, the L1 use in EFL teaching / learning process should be as little as possible (Krashen, 1982). Such an attitude deprives learners of the valuable input which L1 can provide.

Nevertheless, some researchers (Ferguson, 2003; Macaro, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002) re-examined the EFL-only position and arrived at the conclusion that teachers may alternate between using the L1 and EFL but do it judiciously in certain occasions avoiding at the same time the excessive use of L1.

Anton and Dicamilla consider that the use of L1 is beneficial for the language learning process since "it acts as a critical psychological tool that enables learners to construct effective collaborative dialogue in the completion of meaning-based language tasks" (Anton, Dicamilla, 1999). In these conditions, a third approach, coined by Nation 'Balanced Approach' (Nation, 2003) was introduced.

Nowadays, the attitude towards using L1 in EFL classroom changes. The importance of L1 along with L2 developing is now widely accepted among researchers. EFL teachers must not forget about the danger of L1 overuse and therefore L2 underuse in EFL classroom which may lead to the substantial decrease of opportunity to practice the latter, an undesirable outcome. Thus, the judicious use of mother tongue in EFL classroom may be appropriate in certain circumstances. From this perspective, the teacher's decision how much time should be allocated to L1 and L2 in their classes seems to influence the students' performance efficiency in acquiring L2 (Burdujan, 2020).

Since there are no criteria about the right amount of the use of L1, it should be used in a judicious way by the English teacher who should consider the students' level of learning. It should be noted if balanced teacher's use of L1 cannot present a threat to foreign language acquisition. Usually, the lower level of English is, the more L1 is used in class. At the same time, the target language should be used as much as possible in EFL classroom.

The EFL teachers should keep in mind that the comparative analysis between the mother tongue and the target language is important and there is no intention to substitute the L1 by the target language. Larsen-Freeman claims that "the native language of the students is used in the classroom in order to enhance the security of the students, to provide a bridge from the familiar

to the unfamiliar, and to make the meanings of the target language words clear” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). A comparison of L1 and L2 is a very enriching experience, which can enhance the L2 acquisition. This comparison can be done at all language levels.

#### **4.2. Judicious use of mother tongue in EFL classroom**

EFL teachers are often unsure about the use of students’ L1 in the classroom; it is either encouraged or forbidden. Anyway, teachers should not feel guilty while using L1 in cases when it is necessary and appropriate. Grim’s research shows that teachers switch to L1 to “facilitate comprehension, overcome grammatical obstacles and save time in lengthy L2 task explanations”. In fact, the students’ mother tongue is the greatest advantage brought to the EFL classroom (Grim, 2010).

Auerbach claims that “the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn; as they hear and use English, they will internalize it to begin to think in English; the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it” (Auerbach, 1993).

Phillipson (1992) lists five principles of using only English in EFL classrooms:

1. English is the best taught mono-lingual;
2. The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker;
3. The earlier English is taught, the better the result;
4. The more English is taught, the better the result;
5. If other languages are used too much, standards of English will drop.

If the learners are forced to use only the target language in EFL classrooms they may resent learning. Also, it slows down the learners’ pace. Therefore, it is important to consider L1 use in EFL classes.

At times, anyway, using only English in the EFL classroom can cause some problems. Harbord (1992) noticed that teachers who impose an ‘all- English classroom’ may turn out insufficient in meaningful communication causing learner incomprehension and resentment. Since English only classrooms can be harmful to student - teacher interaction; L1 can be used when necessary. Butzkamm (2003) claims that “the mother tongue is generally regarded as being an evasive manoeuvre which is to be used only in emergencies”.

Opposite to the ‘all-English classroom’, Atkinson (1987) provided some advantages of L1 use in EFL classrooms:

1. Eliciting language (all levels).
2. Checking comprehension (all levels).
3. Giving instructions (early levels).
4. Co-operation among learners.
5. Discussions of classroom methodology (early levels).
6. Presentations and reinforcement of language (mainly early levels).
7. Checking for sense.
8. Testing.

While monitoring the learners with who have problems with EFL understanding, teachers may decide the situations when to resort to the L1 use. Thus, the mediating role of mother

tongue is crucial. Atkinson (1987) advocates the L1 use, especially in monolingual classes. He thinks that ‘the potential of the mother tongue as a classroom resource is so great that its role should merit considerable attention and discussion in any attempt to develop a ‘post-communicative’ approach to TEFL for adolescents and adults’.

L1 can be beneficial to keep on the communication in the classroom. The learners express themselves in English until they fail to understand e.g., the meaning of a word so they may clarify it in L1.

The target language must be used wherever / whenever possible and L1 where / when necessary. The issue of judicious use of L1 in EFL learning / teaching process comes - when and where to use it. As stated above, the reasonable use of L1 cannot be avoided in some cases, at the same time L2 should remain the most operational language of EFL learning / teaching process.

So, L1 use in EFL classroom maybe recommended in the following situations (Burdujan, 2020):

1. *Giving instructions.* While doing the tasks in group, in pairs, at project, or even alone, the students must clearly know the details of what they must do. Instructions may be repeated simultaneously in both (L1 and L2) languages, so that the teacher is sure the students have understood what the teacher asks to do.

2. *Explaining abstract terms.* The meaning of abstract words including some notions is very difficult to explain even in L1. In this case, the use of L1 helps students to escape the difficulties of their incomprehension or misunderstanding. Also, L1 use is both “economical and a direct route to a word’s meaning” [Thornbury, p.78].

3. *Teaching grammar.* While teaching grammar, the explanations may judiciously be given in student’s mother tongue to avoid negative transfer. The explanation of grammar in L1 is a very time-saving solution. Also, a comparison between L1 and L2 grammars will highlight the differences between the two languages.

4. *Teaching the low-level students.* Obviously, it seems natural to use L1 with beginners. Especially when other explaining methods such as direct demonstration, synonyms-antonyms, word-building elements, interpretation of word meanings in L2 cannot be properly implemented.

5. *Translation tasks.* Nowadays, both oral and written translation from the native language into the target language or vice versa is often used as classroom technique. Cook (2010) considers the translation a major part of communicative bilingual competence. Therefore, its importance in a globalized and multilingual world has a great educational potential. The traditional ways of translation (e.g., with a paper dictionary) still exist, but nowadays are replaced by machine translators. The accuracy of online translation has been improving considerably so much, that lots of people have questioned whether language learning, and therefore EFL, will still be necessary in the future.

6. *Managing classroom conflicts.* Management of conduct and discipline is often hard to be done in L2, especially, if a serious conflict that interferes with learning process emerges in the classroom. The teacher can try to prevent the conflict in L2, but nevertheless L1 seems to be more efficient.

7. *Discussing errors.* Errors are quite natural to the learning process of foreign language. Unlike native speakers, who can identify and correct their mistakes, non-native speakers who learn L2 have an incomplete knowledge of the target language and are not always able to correct the errors they make by themselves. Discussing errors, especially caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue should be done in L1.

Using L1 reduces the stress the students may have while studying L2. Acceptance of L1 use gives a feeling of security encouraged by the learners' identity.

In fact, the L1 use may contribute to the learning-teaching process; however, its excessive use may result in too much dependence on it, which is less desired outcome. Or the L1 use should not be exaggerated because the more the students are exposed to the target language, the better they will learn it. (Paker and Karaagaç, 2015) Overuse of L1 could produce an unintentional effect causing some difficulties for EFL students to communicate orally in L2. In such a situation, 'there are virtually no studies which have demonstrated that switching to the first language as opposed to maintaining second-language discourse, in specific circumstances, actually leads to better learning whether in the short term or the long term' (Macaro, 2009).

If overused, there are shortcomings of L1 use in EFL classroom. According to Atkinson (1987), excessive use of L1 results in the following risks:

1. The teacher and/or the students may feel that they have not "really" understood some item of language until it has been translated in L1.
2. The teacher and/or the students fail to observe the differences between equivalence of form, semantic equivalence, and pragmatic features, thereby oversimplify to the point of using crude and inaccurate translations.
3. Students speak to the teacher in the mother tongue, even when they are quite capable to express themselves in L2.
4. Students fail to realize that while doing many classroom activities it is critical that they use only L2.

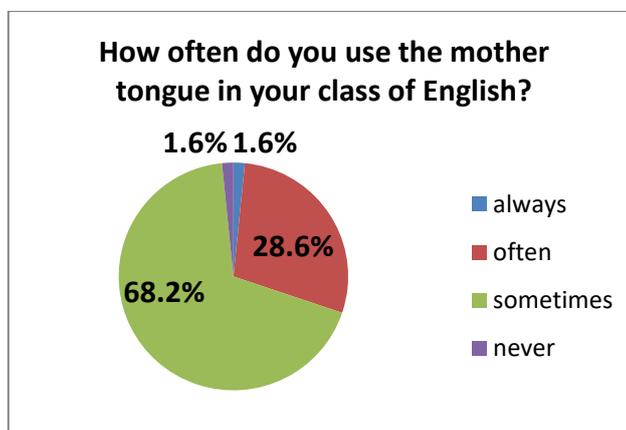
## 5. Findings and Discussion

There is still the dispute over the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. On the one hand there are teachers who are against L1 use and don't recognize any significant potential in it; on the other hand, there are those who overuse it. Thus, how, and when L1 may be used in EFL classroom is one of the hardest decisions the teacher should make. Overall, this research shows how to overcome this difficulty, that means L1 should be used in EFL classroom in a balanced way. The target language should be a means of instruction, at the same time, when possible, the teacher will switch to the mother tongue in certain advised educational situations.

The answers given by the English teachers in the questionnaires are quoted in the below description of the results.

**Question 1.** The first question of the questionnaire was "How often do you use the mother tongue in your class of English?" Four options were proposed "always", "often", "sometimes", and "never". Most respondents (about 2/3) chose the option "sometimes".

*Figure 1: How often do you use the mother tongue in your class of English? (teacher questionnaire)*



The results show that EFL teachers sometimes (about 2/3), or often (less than 1/3) use their mother tongue in their classes of English. At the same time, the answers show that the mother tongue is used at EFL lessons, so its use needs to be aimed to more effective development of language skills.

**Question 2.** The second question of the questionnaire was “In what learning situations do you use L1 in your class of English?” More options were proposed, and more than one answer was possible. In the table below, the results are presented in descending order:

*Table 1: In what learning situations do you use L1 in your class of English? (teacher questionnaire)*

no.	option	percent
1.	to explain difficult grammar rules	93.7%
2.	to explain abstract words	49.2%
3.	to explain errors	46%
4.	translation exercises	42.9%
5.	to manage serious conflicts	38.1%
6.	to check students understanding	36.5%
7.	to give instructions	11.1%
8.	to save time	7.9%

Most respondents (93.7%) use the mother tongue while explaining grammar rules. This is because the grammars of the two languages differ greatly, so for a better understanding of English grammar an explanation in the mother tongue is needed. EFL teachers consider that the number of students who will understand English grammar rules, especially the difficult ones, will increase significantly if it is done in their mother tongue as well.

Almost half of EFL teachers (49.2%) think that abstract notions should also be explained in their mother tongue. It may be difficult for students to understand an abstract notion in their mother tongue, not to mention a foreign language.

Errors are natural to the learning process of foreign language. Unlike native speakers, who can identify and correct mistakes, non-native speakers who learn L2 need help from the part of the teacher to explain errors. Less than a half of EFL teachers (46%) choose to explain errors in the mother tongue.

Grammar-translation method used translation exercises extensively; then a sudden L1 removal followed. Although nowadays there are many machine translation tools, many teachers (42.9%) think that translation exercises should be offered to learners.

The discipline management is often hard to be done in the foreign language, especially, if a serious conflict interferes with learning process. The teacher can try to prevent the conflict in the foreign language they teach, but nevertheless 38.1% of EFL teachers consider that L1 in such cases seems to be more efficient.

More than one third of respondents (36.5%) use mother tongue to check if students understood the taught item. It makes them sure; they can go on with material.

More than one tenth of respondents (11.1%) give instructions in L1. Thus, teacher is sure that the task is understood by the students and will be done as required.

The explanation in mother tongue is a very time-saving solution. In case there is a shortage of time, 7.9% of EFL teachers apply to the mother tongue e.g., to fasten lengthy L2 explanations.

Some respondents (9.5%) consider other situations when the mother tongue may be used. These are presented in the next question of the questionnaire.

**Question 3.** After the analysis of answers to the question “In what other learning situation(s) do you use the mother tongue?”, the respondents may be divided into two groups after their attitude towards L1 use at their English classes: those who advocate “bilingual approach” and accept L1 use, and those who support “monolingual approach” and consider that L1 must be banned or avoided at their English classes.

Our data have revealed that advocates of “bilingual approach” consider that mother tongue is a necessary part of language teaching, and has different functions like “explaining grammar, or vocabulary”, “managing any conflicts (not just serious ones) where just “be quiet!” isn’t enough”, “explaining errors, and exceptions”, “teaching the low-level students / primary classes”, “text translation”, “explaining how to use a digital tool”, “giving the equivalent of proverbs, slangs, motto”, “working with pupils who have especially needs in education I use mother tongue during the lessons”, “when the pupil may not correctly understand an instruction”, “helping students express themselves without fear and to encourage them”, “explaining some errors if it is impossible to understand”, “explaining homework tasks”, etc. It was also found out that the EFL teachers were aware that it is important to use the target language as much as possible in their classes; however, the need of L1 use from time to time cannot be denied.

At the same time, there were opinions that the mother tongue must not be used, or should be avoided as much as possible, in the answers like: “sincerely, I try to speak only English in my class, even in any difficult case. I want to make them speak English”, “I do not use [L1]”, “I try not to use”, “I never use [L1]”. So, the group of teachers who prefer monolingual approach “try” not to use L1 even in the most difficult cases “when pupils really do not understand something” and resort to it only in case they get stuck and can't find another solution.

The analysis of the same question, but from the perspective of learning situations, reveals the fact that the biggest part of English teachers uses L1 while introducing new vocabulary. L1 is used e.g., “when studying the new vocabulary”, “to explain vocabulary”, “meaning of the words”, particularly if there are some “difficult concepts”, or “technical vocabulary”, “when applying scanning reading method, giving the students phrases in their mother tongue to find their equivalents in the whole text”. Also, respondents find difficult to explain the meaning of

proverbs, sayings, idioms, etc. without using L1, especially if there isn't an equivalent in mother tongue. So, EFL teachers use L1 to give "the equivalent of proverbs, slangs, motto", to "find the equivalents of proverbs, sayings", "to explain proverbs when there is no equivalent", when there are "proverbs or to comment on the lesson quote", "to understand idioms/expressions", "to translate/explain idioms, proverbs".

The second great part of respondents feel necessity of L1 use to be sure that the task has been understood. EFL teachers use L1 "sometimes to explain the task they must do", "to explain a task", "sometimes when pupils didn't understand the tasks", "when the pupil may not correctly understand an instruction", "to give instructions to weaker students", "to explain homework tasks". Also, L1 is used if there are some complex tasks, like "a project" / "a project work", or "to explain how to use a digital tool".

L1 use "depends on the age of pupils", "class level", for example "primary level", or "weaker pupils" "with a bad command of English". There are many respondents who consider that L1 should be used while "teaching the low-level students / primary classes", "beginners". Also, "to give instructions to weaker students".

Managing different levels of conflicts, problems, misbehavior is suitable for L1. "When managing any conflicts (not just serious ones) where just "be quiet!" isn't enough, so L1 may be used "to manage serious conflicts", "to solve different problems", "misbehavior", "the behavior of the students during the lesson, "conflicts related to discipline".

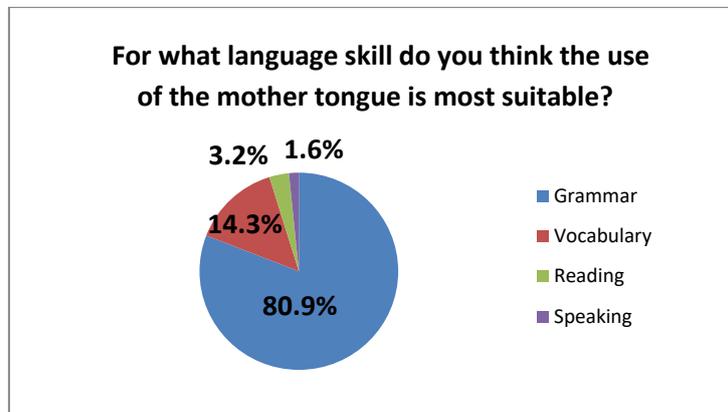
Since English and mother tongue grammars are different, there is a need "to explain grammar" in the other tongue, including "grammar rules", "some tenses", or "exceptions".

Less teachers think that text translations from the native language into the target language or vice versa may be used as classroom technique, also "explaining some errors if it is impossible to understand" is also acceptable.

There are situations of L1 use which are met once in the answers, like "working with pupils who have especially needs". Besides, L1 may "help students express themselves without fear and to encourage them", thus becoming a means of encouragement to speak English.

**Question 4.** The next question of the questionnaire was "For what language skill do you think the use of the mother tongue is most suitable?" Four options were proposed "Grammar", "Vocabulary", "Reading, and "Speaking". Most respondents (about 4/5) chose the option "Grammar".

*Figure 2: For what language skill do you think the use of the mother tongue is most suitable? (teacher questionnaire)*



The answers attest that about 81% of EFL teachers use their mother tongue in their classes of English while explaining grammar. At the same time, about 14.3% of the answers show that the mother tongue is used while teaching vocabulary. The least of respondents chose options: reading (3.2%) and speaking (1.6%).

**Question 5.** The last question asked if the use of the mother tongue during English classes should be: “never used”, “limited and reasonable”, “used as much as possible”. Almost everyone (96,8%) consider that the mother tongue in their EFL classes should be limited and reasonable. Thus, the mother tongue should be used by English teachers very judiciously in EFL classroom.

## **6. Conclusion.**

After the almost total ban of the mother tongue, the communicative language teaching not only accepts the L1 use in EFL classroom, but also it is considered as a valuable resource, which should not be ignored. English teachers should be against the excessive use of L1, but they may use it judiciously in occasions such as understanding new abstract words, assessing comprehension, giving instructions, and explaining grammar. Thus, the mother tongue returned into the spotlight and became useful but still neglected resource in EFL teaching.

Both, the EFL teacher and the learners cannot avoid the mother tongue while teaching and learning. A judicious use of L1 in EFL classes can bring only advantages. L1 use must synchronize with effective target language teaching, or the students’ cultural background in general and mother tongue in particular, should be taken into consideration.

Nowadays in Republic of Moldova, mother tongue and foreign languages are separate school subjects, which together contribute towards a more general educational goal: the development of global citizen. The learning/teaching processes of the mother tongue and foreign language(s) should be mutually advantageous developing intercultural competence at learners.

The basic idea remains that the EFL teachers should use L2 most of the time. At the same time, L1 may be used when it is appropriate or necessary. This study has shown the necessity of using mother tongue in the following learning situations: when explaining L2 grammar; when comparing L2 and L1 grammars; to be sure that the explanations were understood by the learners; at the beginning of EFL study; translation exercises.

Based on the previous research, it can be concluded that first language or mother tongue may either help, or even became a barrier in teaching/learning process of a target language such

as learning English. It depends on the quantity of L1 use and accordance with acceptable educational situations when L1 may be used.

Most EFL teachers feel the necessity of using L1, but they are not sure about the educational situations and how much they should use it. Many teachers who participated in this study consider that the L1 use should be limited and reasonable.

The L1 use in the classroom does not impede learning, as many teachers claim, but it helps learning. In EFL classroom, L1 is more and more often used in various aspects and activities especially while explaining meaning, or grammar, correcting the errors and giving instructions. The results of this research can prove that L1 can be useful for EFL learning and can bring advantages if pedagogical activities are well designed.

Finally, the findings of the present study revealed that teachers accept L1 use in various educational situations (approved by more than 36% of respondents), like explaining difficult grammar rules, explaining abstract words, explaining errors, checking students understanding, doing translation exercises.

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