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## **Students' and teachers' attitudes towards the use of the first language in the EFL State School Classrooms**

### **Στάσεις των μαθητών και εκπαιδευτικών απέναντι στη χρήση της πρώτης γλώσσας στις τάξεις των Αγγλικών ως Ξένη Γλώσσα στην Δημόσια Εκπαίδευση**

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*The role of mother tongue (L1) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been the subject of much debate and controversy in the last decades. An increasing number of researchers and practitioners (e.g. Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2005) stress that L1 can positively affect L2 performance and development and emphasize the growing methodological need for systematic and judicious use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. However, other researchers (e.g. Duff & Polio, 1990; Ellis, 1984) take a different view on the issue and support that only L2 maximization can enhance the learning process. This paper looks more closely at the L1/L2 debate by examining the classroom practices, beliefs and attitudes of EFL students and teachers in two public secondary schools in Cyprus towards the use of students' L1. Questionnaires were distributed to 96 EFL students and interviews were conducted with three EFL secondary school teachers. The results of the study showed that while the majority of students believe that their L1 has a place in the EFL classroom, e.g. it makes them feel comfortable expressing themselves and helps them understand difficult concepts, teachers' beliefs towards the use of the L1 varied. Two of the teachers shared negative attitudes towards it, whereas one of them stressed the importance of L1 in the L2 classroom. The most important factors that seemed to influence teachers' decisions about 'when' and 'how' to use the L1 relate to students' level of proficiency and needs. The findings of this study have important implications for second educational policy and future research in state schools.*

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*Ο ρόλος της μητρικής γλώσσας (L1) στο χώρο της Απόκτησης της Δεύτερης Γλώσσας (SLA) έχει αποτελέσει αντικείμενο μεγάλης συζήτησης και αντιπαράθεσης κατά τις τελευταίες*

δεκαετίες. Ένας μεγάλος αριθμός ερευνητών και εκπαιδευτικών (π.χ. Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2005) πιστεύουν ότι η χρήση της μητρικής γλώσσας μπορεί να επηρεάσει θετικά την απόδοση και την ανάπτυξη της εκμάθησης της δεύτερης γλώσσας και τονίζουν την αυξανόμενη μεθοδολογική ανάγκη για συστηματική και ορθολογική χρήση της μητρικής γλώσσας. Ωστόσο, άλλοι ερευνητές (π.χ. Duff & Polio, 1990; Ellis, 1984) έχουν διαφορετική άποψη για το θέμα και υποστηρίζουν ότι η αύξηση της χρήσης της δεύτερης γλώσσας βοηθά στην μάθησή της. Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει πιο προσεκτικά το θέμα της αντιπαράθεσης της μητρικής και δεύτερης γλώσσας εξετάζοντας τις πρακτικές, τις πεποιθήσεις και τις στάσεις των μαθητών και καθηγητών Αγγλικής ως ξένη γλώσσα (EFL) σε δύο δημόσια σχολεία της δευτεροβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης στην Κύπρο όσον αφορά τη χρήση της μητρικής γλώσσας των μαθητών (L1). Τα ερωτηματολόγια διανεμήθηκαν σε 96 μαθητές και διεξήχθησαν συνεντεύξεις με τρεις καθηγητές Αγγλικής. Τα αποτελέσματα της μελέτης δείχνουν ότι η πλειοψηφία των μαθητών πιστεύει ότι η μητρική τους γλώσσα έχει θέση στην τάξη των Αγγλικών, καθώς τους κάνει να αισθάνονται άνετα να εκφραστούν και τους βοηθά να κατανοήσουν δύσκολες έννοιες. Οι πεποιθήσεις των εκπαιδευτικών για τη χρήση της μητρικής γλώσσας είναι ποικίλες. Δύο από τους διδάσκοντες είχαν αρνητική στάση ως προς την χρήση της μητρικής γλώσσας, ενώ ένας από αυτούς υπογράμμισε τη σημασία της μητρικής γλώσσας ως εργαλείο στην τάξη. Οι πιο σημαντικοί παράγοντες που επηρεάζουν τους εκπαιδευτικούς σχετικά με το 'πότε' και το 'πώς' να χρησιμοποιούν την μητρική γλώσσα αφορούν το επίπεδο επάρκειας και τις ανάγκες των μαθητών. Τα ευρήματα της μελέτης αυτής έχουν σημαντικές συνέπειες για την ξενόγλωσση εκπαιδευτική πολιτική καθώς και για την μελλοντική έρευνα στη δημόσια εκπαίδευση.

**Key words:** mother tongue (L1), second language (L2), target language (TL), student questionnaires, teacher interviews, state schools, EFL classroom practices, beliefs and attitudes

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of whether first language (L1) use should be excluded or constitute an aiding "resource" (Cook, 2001) in second or foreign language classrooms is a controversial issue that has been discussed and investigated in SLA theory and literature as well as in various EFL contexts over the last decades. However, we know little about the use of the L1 in the language learning context of Cyprus where learning English is of particular importance.

This study examines the reported classroom practices, beliefs and attitudes of students and teachers in two public secondary schools in Cyprus, concerning the use of the students' first language via questionnaires and interviews.

## 2. Literature review

The view of L2 exclusivity in the EFL classroom has been strong in much of the SLA literature. Promoters of the ban of L1 suggest that input in the L2 provides a necessary and sufficient condition for language acquisition (Krashen, 1981; Krashen & Teller, 1983; Duff & Polio, 1990). Similarly, Chaudron (1988) suggests that the fullest competence in the

second/target language (L2) is accomplished if the teacher provides students with a rich L2 environment in which L2 is not only used for instruction and drill but also for disciplinary and management processes. Ellis (1984) also emphasizes the significance of using the L2 for management purposes and asserts that if otherwise, teachers “deprive the learners of valuable input in the L2” (p. 133). Cook (2001) also suggests that successful L2 acquisition depends on acquiring an L2 in the way that monolingual children acquire their L1 and recommends keeping L1 and L2 systems separate so as to avoid interference from the L1.

On the other hand, advocates of L1 use in the foreign language (FL) classroom hold a broad range of counter-arguments. They stress that the role of L1 use in teaching methodology in FL classrooms is of paramount importance (Nazary, 2008). In an early publication, Larsen-Freeman (2000) highlighted the advantages of using the L1 in the EFL context. She scrutinized the role of L1 across various English Language Teaching (ELT) methods and found that the learners’ L1 has a place in almost all teaching methods (with the exception of the Direct and Audiolingual Method). A significant number of researchers have identified important functions served by the L1 in the EFL classroom. Particularly, it is argued that the L1 can be used to raise awareness about the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 (Schweers, 1999; Carson & Kashihara 2012), give learners a sense of confidence and authenticate their experiences by allowing them to express themselves more easily (Schweers, 1999; Auerbach, 1993). In addition, evidence suggests that L1 can be used to supply scaffolding in order to lower affective filters (Meyer, 2008; Schweers, 1999) and helps learners with language disorders (Nazary, 2008). In the relevant literature, L1 is also identified as a tool to give instructions, discuss classroom methodology, check comprehension, build rapport, control pupils’ behaviour, and teach grammar explicitly (Atkinson, 1987; Macaro, 2005). Other L1 uses by teachers include bridging communication gaps (Nzwanga, 2000), disciplining the students (Macaro, 2001) and communicating about grammar, tests and assignments (Levince, 2003, 2014).

Teachers’ and learners’ attitudes and perceptions towards the use of L1 in the FL classroom have been investigated in a number of studies; some of them concentrate solely on the perception of students while other studies examine the attitudes of both the teachers and the students. However, research in the field seems to remain inconclusive since in some of these studies teachers and students report the importance of L1 as a tool that facilitates learning (Schweers, 1999; Burden 2001; Hopkins 1989), while in others participants appear reluctant to use it and share negative attitudes towards it (Duff & Polio, 1990; Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003; Nazary 2008).

In Greece and Cyprus, the use of L1 in EFL classrooms is a topic that has not been thoroughly researched since only two studies were conducted in the Greek and Cypriot EFL context. For instance, Prodromou (2002), investigating the attitudes of Greek EFL students, found that the higher the level of proficiency of the students the less their preference for L1 use in the classroom. In the same setting, Giannikas (2011) working with primary school students found that EFL teachers were reluctant to maximize L2 use due to traditional teaching trends and adherence to the curriculum. While L1 was mainly used for instructions, rules, social needs and grammar explanations, L2 use was restricted to course book corrections and games.

In Cyprus, Copland and Neokleous (2010) found that teachers in private institutions professed affective and cognitive reasons for using or excluding L1. Research conducted by Vassiliou (2010) in public EFL classrooms in Cyprus showed that teachers of public primary schools used L1 mainly for teaching grammar and disciplining the students.

While the views of researchers differ on the L1/L2 divide, we do not yet have a clear picture of what happens in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language, e.g. such as the public primary and secondary education in Cyprus. It is therefore important to further explore teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes about the role of L1 in the EFL classroom since to date very few studies have been conducted to address the topic in the local context (Copland & Neokleous, 2010; Vasiliou, 2010). As a result, this paper examines the classroom practices, beliefs and attitudes of students and teachers in public secondary schools in Cyprus, with regard to the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. The results are expected to provide important insights about students' learning needs.

### **3. The aims and methodology of the present study**

To be able to investigate teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes as well as teachers' practices regarding the use of L1 in the EFL classrooms of secondary state schools in Cyprus, five research questions were identified as follows:

- A. What are students' and teachers' attitudes towards the use of L1 in EFL state school classrooms in Cyprus?
- B. Do teachers and students believe that the use of L1 by the teacher is necessary? If yes, on what occasions?
- C. Which factors do teachers believe influence their use of L1 in the EFL classroom?
- D. What is the frequency of L2 use in the EFL classroom as reported by teachers and students?
- E. Do teachers' and students' reported L1 use coincides with actual use in the EFL classroom?

#### **3.1. Participants**

Ninety-six (N=96) Greek Cypriot EFL students participated in this study. The participants were students in two public secondary schools in Cyprus. 52.1% of the participants were in the first grade of senior high schools (Lyceum), 20.8% were in the second grade and 27.1% in the third. The students were all adolescents aged 15-18. 52.1% of students had three periods of English lessons per week, while 47.9% had six periods. For students in the first grade, English was a compulsory course taught for three periods a week, whereas for second and third grade students English language learning was elective and students were required to attend it for six periods per week.

The three EFL teachers of the participant students were all female. Each teacher had at least ten years of teaching experience. The teachers' L1 was Greek but they all reported that they felt as comfortable speaking English as they did when they spoke their L1. For the purposes of this study, the teachers were named Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3.

### **3.2. Methodology**

To answer the research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from two public secondary schools in Larnaca, a city in the southeast of Cyprus. Quantitative data were collected in order to empirically investigate students' beliefs towards the use of the L1 in the EFL classroom. Therefore, a survey in the form of a self-administered questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed to measure students' (a) estimations of the quantity of L1 use by their teachers in the EFL classroom (b) attitudes towards L1 use in the EFL classroom and (c) beliefs about the use of L1 by their teacher. The items of the questionnaire were adapted from Vassiliou (2010) and Schweers (1999). The first version of the questionnaire was piloted with a small number of students. Based on their comments the questionnaire was refined to ensure clarity and avoid repetitive items.

In addition, qualitative data were obtained to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' attitude and practice regarding the use of the L1 and investigate the reasons that guided these attitudes. Therefore, semi-structured interviews with three EFL teachers took place in order to compare and contrast teachers' views with students' questionnaires responses. The interviews, based on a series of guiding questions (see Appendix B), elicited information about the teachers' background and training, philosophy of teaching, attitudes towards using L1 in the classroom, factors that influenced teachers' use of L1 and Ministry guidelines and policies. At the end of the interviews, teachers were asked to estimate the amount of L1 they used so that their answers could be compared to those of the students'.

### **3.3. Data analysis**

After the data collection, all students' questionnaires were divided into three groups, according to the teacher in charge. For example, 19.8% of the student population were taught by Teacher 1 while 33.3% by Teacher 2 and 46.9% were students of Teacher 3. The reason for dividing students' questionnaires in the three groups was to be able to compare each group's responses to their teacher's responses.

The questionnaire data analysis was done using the SPSS statistical analysis package (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 17 for Windows). Various statistical analyses were performed. Descriptive statistics will be reported in percentages. Correlations between the variables, e.g. agreement of students' and teachers' L1 use, were reported by calculating two-tailed Pearson Correlation (see Table 4, Appendix C). For the open-ended questions, the answers provided by the students were separated into keywords and categorized into concepts (Dörnyei, 2010, p. 85).

The three interviews with the EFL teachers were audio-recorded to secure an accurate account of the conversations and avoid losing data. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed by the researchers. The technique used to analyse the answers of the interviews was "quote research". According this, quotes from interviews were identified and were used as illustrative or confirming examples (Folkestad, 2008).

## 4. Presentation of Findings

### 4.1. Beliefs about L1 use in L2 classroom

Table 1 exhibits several important results with regard to students' perceptions. Specifically, 49% of the students believe that there are situations where L1 should be used in the classroom whereas 76% of them report that if teachers use more L2, students will communicate better in the L2. Another contradiction identified is that while 86.5% of the students believe that Greek should only be used as a last resort, 72.9% of the students report that they feel more comfortable and relaxed when teachers use the L1 in class. An outstanding percentage of students (87.5%) believe that L1 should be used in instances where students do not understand what is being said. Even though students report that the L2 should be the primary means of communication in the classroom, they seem to favour L1 use when difficulties arise.

<i>Student Questionnaire – Part II</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
1. Students are better at communicating if teachers use L2	76.0%	5.2%	18.8%
2. There are no situations for L1 use	3.1%	49.0%	47.9%
3. Teachers should use L2 at all times	41.7%	21.9%	36.5%
4. Teachers should use L1 if students do not understand	87.5%	7.3%	5.2%
5. Teachers can use L1 as a last resort	86.5%	9.4%	4.2%
6. Students feel relaxed when L1 is used	72.9%	14.6%	12.5%

*Table 1. Students' beliefs about the use of L1 in the L2 classroom.*

Interestingly Teachers 1 and 2 shared similar views concerning the use of L1. Both of them argued that Greek should be used very rarely. They explained that L2 should be the primary means of communication in the EFL classroom and L1 should be used only when it is necessary, e.g.:

Teacher 1: I think it is very important is to use English... and when it's really necessary then use Greek. It's necessary to speak some Greek because some students complain that they do not understand... so I use Greek very rarely.

Teacher 2: They [teachers] definitely have to use English because you get them [students] thinking in the mode of the English language, so next time they produce something it's much easier for them.

Teacher 3 expressed a rather different point of view since she is of the opinion that the use of L1 is essential when teaching a foreign language, especially vocabulary and that educators should be encouraged to do so, e.g.

Teacher 3: I am one of those people who believe that the mother tongue should be used to explain things that would clarify the meaning to the students. Teachers should not be afraid to use their mother tongue when the need arises. Mother tongue is very very important.

#### 4.2. Instances of L1 use

As it is evident in Table 2, students see a place for L1 in the EFL classrooms especially when explaining grammar, defining new vocabulary, explaining reading and text comprehension and giving instructions. Students' answers with regard to the remaining three uses of the L1, namely teaching pronunciation, writing and interacting informally with students do not provide conclusive answers as to whether these are permissible L1 uses or not.

<i>Student Questionnaire – Part III</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
1. Explain grammar	57.3%	12.5%	28.1%
2. Define new vocabulary	77.1%	12.5%	10.4%
3. Teach pronunciation	32.3%	30.2%	36.5%
4. Teach reading and text comprehension	60.4%	20.8%	17.7%
5. Teach writing	35.4%	27.1%	37.5%
6. Interact informally with students	49.0%	27.1%	24.0%
7. Give instructions	15.6%	25.0%	59.4%

Table 2. Students' beliefs about the use of L1 by the teacher.

The three teachers were also asked whether there are any particular instances during their EFL lessons that would make them resort to L1. Teacher 1 reported using the L1 mainly to define new vocabulary, and only after the students ask her to translate specific words in Greek. She also mentioned that she sometimes uses Greek to advise the students or discipline them. Teacher 2 said that there is always a way to teach or explain something without using the L1. The only instance she would justify the use of L1 would be when students have difficulties in understanding an exercise:

Teacher 2: There's a way to do things without translating... however if you see that students may be lost with the rubric of an exercise, with what the exercise wants them to do ... and you tried by giving them examples and they still do not understand, then you might think of using Greek.

The case was different with Teacher 3, who openly stated that she resorts to L1 to explain the meaning of words to save time and help learners, e.g.:

Teacher 3: What's the point of giving long definitions instead of just giving them the word in Greek? It's time consuming and it does not give time to understand and absorb the meaning of a word or a text.

### **4.3. Factors influencing L1 use in the L2 classroom**

Teachers' interviews showed that their decision as to whether they should resort to the L1 seems to be heavily influenced by the students' L2 skills and their proficiency level, as this was stressed by all the teachers. Teacher 1 referred particularly to incidents when several unsuccessful attempts to explain meaning in L2 concluded in L1 recourse while Teacher 2 admitted that she mainly makes use of L2. On rare occasions she needed to use L1 due to students' L2 skills. The same reasons were recorded by Teacher 3 for the use of L1, who also mentioned that the type of the activity is an influential reason to resort to the L1.

Another interesting finding was that none of the three teachers reported to be affected by the nature of the Ministry's policies and guidelines. They all stated that there is no specific training or guidelines they receive on this issue even though they attend seminars organised by the Ministry every semester. All three teachers believe that Greek should not be used, though they seem to be unaware of any policies from the Ministry concerning the use of L1 in the EFL classroom and mainly base their opinion on their own beliefs and assumptions. These are some of their responses:

Teacher 1: I think we are not allowed to use Greek or give the definitions of words in Greek.

Teacher 2: I assume that this is the case [the English only policy] - if you teach a FL then you need to speak the FL to invite the students to use it.

Teacher 3: You are not supposed to use Greek. However I don't think that there is a policy like this because we have students coming from various backgrounds so you are probably going to lose them if you speak only Greek.

### **4.4. Reported occurrence of the use of L1**

#### *4.4.1. Students' general estimation*

Students were asked to estimate the amount of L1 their teacher uses in eight communicative contexts in the classroom. Table 3 provides important findings about the estimation of amount of teachers' L1 use (see Part IV, Students Questionnaire, Appendix A). The most striking observation relates to three particular occasions when teachers make use of the L1 at around 81-100% of the time. Specifically 43.8% of students estimated that their teacher uses the L1 almost entirely (81-100% of the time) to communicate with students informally while 38.5% reported that their teacher uses the same amount of L1 to give instructions for tests, quizzes and other assignments. Notably a significant percentage of 58.3% of students reported that their teacher resorts to L1 at about 81-100% of the time for discipline purposes. Using L1 to teach pronunciation is not as frequent whereas students' reports indicate substantial but wide range in the amount of L1 use in instances such as teaching grammar, defining vocabulary and teaching writing.



<i>Student Questionnaire - PART IV</i>	<i>0-20%</i>	<i>21-40%</i>	<i>41-60%</i>	<i>61-80%</i>	<i>81-100%</i>
My teacher uses Greek to ..... of the time we spend discussing or working on this					
1. explain grammar	11.5%	25.0%	20.8%	27.1%	15.6%
2. define new vocabulary	19.8%	24.0%	14.6%	14.6%	26.0%
3. teach pronunciation	49.0%	22.9%	6.3%	8.3%	12.5%
4. explain reading and text comprehension	16.7%	30.2%	17.7%	16.7%	16.7%
5. teach writing	19.8%	33.3%	22.9%	8.3%	14.6%
6. communicate with the students informally (jokes, socializing etc)	16.7%	11.5%	12.5%	15.6%	43.8%
7. give us instructions for tests, quizzes and other assignments	6.3%	14.6%	21.9%	18.8%	38.5%
8. discipline the students	7.3%	7.3%	17.7%	9.4%	58.3%

*Table 3. Student general estimation of the amount of L1 use in the classroom.*

#### *4.4.2. Students' and teachers' estimations of teachers' overall L1 use*

The questionnaire also revealed some interesting findings regarding students' estimations of L1 use by individual teachers. For instance, a strong majority of students (52.7%) concurred that Teacher 1 uses L1 to give instructions for tests and assignments in approximately 21-60% of her teaching time while an equally significant percentage of students (68.4%) agrees that the teacher uses Greek for discipline purposes in about 81% of the classroom time. Almost half of the students (42.1%) reported that their teacher uses the L1 to interact informally with them in approximately 81-100% of classroom time. Interestingly, 68.4% and 73.7% of the students said that their teacher uses the L1 to teach reading/text comprehension and teach grammar respectively in less than 40% of her teaching time. When giving definitions of new vocabulary and explaining pronunciation, the majority of students reported that the teacher used the L1 for less than 20% of teaching time. However, Teacher 1 estimations in Table 3 are consistently different from those of the students since she admitted using the L1 more than 21% of the time she spends to define new vocabulary, while in all the other seven contexts she reported that she uses Greek less than 20% of her teaching time.

The variability in teachers' and students' estimations is also evident for Teacher 2. While the majority (71.8%) of the students estimated that Teacher 2 uses Greek to teach grammar between 40-60% of the teaching time, she said that she spends a lot less, e.g. 0-20% (see Table 3). In addition 62.5% of the students reported that Teacher 2 uses L1 to define new vocabulary more than 40% of the time and 53.1% of the students believed that she uses Greek to explain pronunciation less than 20% of the time they spend on this.

According to the students Teacher 2 also uses Greek to teach reading and text comprehension in less than 40% of the time devoted to it. 68.8% of the students also reported that Teacher 2 uses the L1 to teach writing for about 20-60% of the time they spend on it. The majority of the students reported that their teacher uses Greek to communicate with them informally, give test and assignment instructions and discipline them more than 60% of the time they spend on these areas. However, as can be seen in Table 3, the estimation of Teacher 2 on the use of the L1 in the EFL classroom greatly differs from what her students have reported. Particularly, Teacher 2 estimated that she uses Greek in no more than 20% of the time she spends on all eight instances mentioned. The only case her estimation and her students' estimation coincide is when she teaches pronunciation.

The majority of the students of Teacher 3 estimated that their teacher uses Greek to explain and discuss grammar, define new vocabulary and explain instructions for tests and assignments in more than 60% of her teaching time. An interesting finding is that more than 53% of the students estimated that Teacher 3 uses L1 to socialize and communicate with them while she spends more than 80% of the time to discipline them. 60% of the students also reported that their teacher uses Greek to teach reading and text comprehension in more than 40% of her time. In addition, 60% of the students supported that their teacher uses Greek to explain pronunciation in less than 40% of the time. As far as teaching writing is concerned, the estimations of the students are dispersed and thus no definite conclusions can be drawn.

As indicated in Table 4, Teacher 3 reported that she uses Greek to define new vocabulary in less than 60% of the time she spends on such language areas. She also estimated that she uses L1 to communicate informally with the students in less than 40% of the time spent on this. In all other six instances Teacher 3 said that she uses Greek less than 20% of the time she spends on similar activities. Similarly to the case of Teacher 1 and 2, Teacher's 3 estimations also greatly differ from her students' reports on the use of the L1 in the classroom.

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>explains grammar</i>	<i>defines new vocabulary</i>	<i>teaches pronunciation</i>	<i>explains reading and text comprehension</i>	<i>teaches writing</i>	<i>communicates with the students informally</i>	<i>gives instructions for tests</i>	<i>disciplines the students</i>
<b>1</b>	0-20%	21-40%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%
<b>2</b>	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%
<b>3</b>	0-20%	41-60%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	21-40%	0-20%	0-20%

Table 4. Teachers' estimations of the amount of their use of L1 in the classroom.

#### **4.5. Correlation between reported amount of L1 use and students' age**

Further correlational statistics (Pearson correlation coefficient) revealed that students' reported amount of L1 use in class was found to have a significantly negative relationship with the age of the students (see Table 4, Appendix C). Overall, these results suggest that the younger the students are, the more amounts of L1 are reported to be used by the teachers. Therefore, it is supported that the three teachers use more L1 with younger students whereas they tend to reduce the amount of L1 with older students. However, it is important to mention that although this correlation is drawn from the results of the students' reports on their teachers' L1 use, none of the teachers considered students' age to be one of the factors influencing their decision to use the L1 during the interviews.

### **5. Summary of the findings**

In line with previous research findings (Schweers, 1999; Burden, 2001; Hopkins, 1989), the results of the study indicate that students perceive a place for L1 in their monolingual EFL class, although they consider the use of the L2 to be greatly important. Students feel that the L1 facilitates learning and makes them feel more confident. They do, however, demand from their teachers to use more L2 than L1 in order to improve their skills in L2. This is supported by the majority of the students (76%) who believe that if teachers use more English than Greek, they will be better at communicating in English.

Teachers on the other hand perceive a place for L1 in class but the majority (Teachers 1 and 2) agrees that their primary goal should be to maximise L2 use. However, Teacher 3 does not share the same conviction as she considers the L1 to be a facilitating tool rather than a source of negative interference. Teachers' beliefs about the use of L1 in the EFL classroom support Macaro's (2005) argument that the majority of teachers consider L1 use "unfortunate and regrettable but necessary" (p. 68).

The findings also showed that the L1 was considered to be an invaluable teaching tool for teaching new vocabulary, reading and grammar, giving instructions for tests and helping students understand difficult concepts. These findings are consistent with those in Burden (2001) and Levine (2003) who found that participants also favoured L1 use for purposes of teaching grammar and vocabulary, giving instructions and communicating about tests and assignments.

The results of this study also indicate that there is some disparity in teachers' L1 frequency and purposes. Teachers resort to L1 when students have difficulties in understanding certain contexts. Teacher 1, for example, reported that she uses L1 to define new vocabulary and sometimes to discipline the students, while Teacher 3 uses Greek to explain vocabulary, to teach reading and give feedback. Teacher 2 insists that the only occasion she would use Greek would be to offer individual support to students who have difficulties in understanding an activity. Teachers' beliefs are consistent with Nzwanga (2000) and Polio and Duff (1994), who found that most of the times teachers use the L1 to bridge communication gaps and negotiate meaning.

The results of this study also identified several factors affecting teachers' decisions on how much L1 should be used. These are related with students' abilities such as their L2 language skills and overall academic level rather than teachers' L2 skills and self-confidence when using L2. Teachers in the current study use L1 in order to avoid the alienation of low achievers caused by poor understanding, which may lead to anxious students and limit opportunities for learning. This finding is in agreement with Vasiliou's (2010) findings who argued that when it comes to "controllable" factors the teachers do not allow these to influence their L2 use, whereas factors that are "beyond the direct control of the teachers" do influence their L2 and L1 use (p. 141). Another interesting finding of this study is that none of the three teachers was aware or influenced by the Ministry's policy with regard to L1 use in L2 classes but instead used the amount of L1/L2 they thought was appropriate. This finding contradicts the results of Duff and Polio (1990), who suggested that institutional policies on L2 use (among other factors) influence teachers' use of L1.

In line with other studies (Duff & Polio, 1990; Levine, 2003; Nzwanga, 2000; Macaro, 2001; Copland & Georgiou, 2010; Vasiliou, 2010) the results of this study indicated a wide range of L1 use by the teachers. Students reported that their teachers use more L1 when giving instructions for tests and assignments, communicating informally with the students and disciplining them.

However, teachers' estimations about the amount of L1 appear to greatly differ from what their students reported. In other words teachers' desires about L1 use are clearly in conflict with their classroom realities. All three teachers reported lower amounts of L1 use than their students. The fact that the striking majority of students did not agree on the amount of L1 use by their teacher may suggest that teachers did not accurately report on their classroom practice. This finding is linked to Copland and Neokleous (2011) who argue that if teachers reported accurately on their classroom practices, they would have to admit incompetence, and perhaps challenge their personal philosophies of learning and teaching. A final, yet important, finding of this study is the relationship between the amount of teachers' L1 use and students' age. The results suggest that as students become older, teachers tend to decrease the use of L1 in the classroom. It seems that L1 is more useful at lower levels as it can be used to introduce the major differences between L1 and L2 (also in Cole 1998).

## 6. Implications of the study

The findings of this study have a number of implications. Firstly, studies such as the present one can raise FL teachers' awareness of how L2 is being used in the classroom and how changes in L1 and L2 use might be implemented. Consciousness-raising among teachers is important because they may not realize the extent to which they use L1 in the EFL classroom. Indeed, teachers' interviews contradicted their students' reports concerning the use of L1 in class. According to Polio and Duff (1994) this is a common finding in studies where retrospection and self-reported data are collected since speakers in social settings are often unaware of their language use in a given situation. It is argued (ibid) that language teachers must first become aware of their practices in order to apply their language knowledge and skills. A simple way for teachers to do so would be, for example, to view a videotape of themselves teaching and then observe their various uses of L1 so as to examine their behaviour in class.

Interestingly, nearly all the participants in the study reported teachers' L1 use to some extent. This fact puts into question the feasibility of the L2 exclusivity policy that exists in Cyprus since the educational policies were contradicted by teachers' classroom practices. Future research could examine whether this phenomenon occurs in other schools in Cyprus. If so, the Ministry might consider revising its policy with regard to L2 use as it does not seem to work in practice. A starting point would be teacher training which could provide teachers with strategies for balanced L1 and L2 use.

No other study conducted in the Cypriot context took into consideration students' views and beliefs. The findings of this study showed that students consider a place for L1 in the EFL classroom, especially when difficulties arise. It could be suggested that decision makers should consider a more thorough examination of students' attitudes and beliefs concerning the use of L1 and L2 in the classroom, and possibly take into consideration their views and needs when the principles regarding EFL pedagogy are decided. Finally, further research could empirically examine whether students learn better when L1 is used.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper aimed at contributing to a descriptive model of L1 and L2 use in the EFL secondary classrooms in Cyprus. More specifically, this study aimed at exploring Cypriot students' and teachers' attitudes and beliefs concerning the use of L1 in the EFL classroom at secondary level and the reported classroom practices in two public secondary schools. Data were drawn through student questionnaires and three semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers. Similarly to Vasiliou's (2010) study in public primary schools in Cyprus, the results of this study indicate that despite the prevailing principle of L2 exclusivity in Cypriot public secondary classrooms, both the L1 and the L2 appear to have a place in the classroom with L1 serving important functions.

The findings of the current study indicate that a more critical approach to the use of L1 and L2 is needed by educational policy makers in Cyprus. As pointed out by Macaro (2001), the task of educators is to identify effective pedagogical principles that acknowledge and support the classroom as a multilingual environment. This could be achieved by raising teachers' awareness about their students' needs in the EFL classroom and the right balance of L1/L2 use that should be applied in the classroom. The current results underscore the need for concrete future guidelines regarding the use of L1 by the EFL teacher that indicate which kinds of code-switching behaviours facilitate L2 acquisition and which behaviours undermine it (Levine, 2003).

However, further research is needed that would take into account classroom observations apart from interviews and questionnaire that could shed more light on the topic. The number of schools and teachers that were interviewed was limited due to practical constraints, such as time limits and the unwillingness of other teachers to take part in this research study. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to describe all Cypriot students' and teachers' beliefs regarding the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. As suggested above, the findings of this study provide the ground for further research to investigate the use of L1 in EFL classrooms in Cyprus.

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## Appendix A

### Student Questionnaire

Ο σκοπός της έρευνας είναι να κατανοήσουμε καλύτερα τις απόψεις και τις προτιμήσεις των μαθητών σχετικά με την χρήση της Ελληνικής γλώσσας από τον/ την καθηγητή/ρια στο μάθημα των Αγγλικών. Δεν υπάρχουν σωστές και λανθασμένες απαντήσεις. Επίσης, η συμπλήρωση του ερωτηματολογίου είναι ανώνυμη και τα δεδομένα που θα συλλεχθούν θα παραμείνουν εμπιστευτικά.

Ευχαριστούμε πάρα πολύ για την βοήθειά σας

#### **PART I – Tick (✓) what is true for you / ΜΕΡΟΣ Ι – Σημείωσε ✓ σε ότι ισχύει για εσένα**

1. Gender/ Φύλο:  Male/ Αρσενικό  Female/ Θηλυκό
2. Age/ Ηλικία:  15  16  17  18
3. Grade of Lyceum/ Τάξη Λυκείου:  1<sup>st</sup> / Α'  2<sup>nd</sup> / Β'  3<sup>rd</sup> / Γ'
4. Periods of English lessons per week/ Περιόδοι Αγγλικών την εβδομάδα  
 2  3  4  6

#### **PART II -Tick (✓) / ΜΕΡΟΣ ΙΙ- Σημείωσε ✓**

General opinion about the use of L2 in the EFL classroom/ Γενική άποψη για την χρήση της ξένης γλώσσας (Αγγλικά) στην τάξη

	Agree/ Συμφωνώ	Disagree / Διαφωνώ	Don't know/ Δεν ξέρω
1. If the teacher uses more English than Greek, the students will be better at communicating in English./ Άν ο/η καθηγητής/ρια χρησιμοποιεί περισσότερο Αγγλικά παρά Ελληνικά, οι μαθητές θα μπορούν να επικοινωνούν καλύτερα στα Αγγλικά .			
2. There are no situations in which Greek should be used in the classroom. / Σε καμιά περίπτωση δεν πρέπει τα Ελληνικά να χρησιμοποιούνται στην τάξη.			
3. Regardless how much English the students choose to use, the teachers should use English at all times in the classroom./ Ανεξάρτητα με το πόσα Αγγλικά χρησιμοποιούν οι μαθητές, οι καθηγητές πρέπει να χρησιμοποιούν Αγγλικά συνέχεια στην τάξη.			
4. Teachers should use Greek if the students do not understand something./ Οι καθηγητές πρέπει να χρησιμοποιούν τα Ελληνικά όταν οι μαθητές δεν καταλαβαίνουν κάτι.			
5. Teachers can use Greek as a last resort, after using English and other means of communication (miming, body language, paraphrasing)/ Οι καθηγητές μπορούν να χρησιμοποιούν τα Ελληνικά σαν τελευταία λύση, αφού			



έχουν δοκιμάσει στα Αγγλικά καθώς και άλλα μέσα επικοινωνίας (μίμηση, γλώσσα του σώματος, παράφραση)			
6. When the teacher uses Greek, the students feel more relaxed and comfortable in class. / Όταν οι καθηγητές χρησιμοποιούν Ελληνικά, οι μαθητές νιώθουν πιο άνετα στην τάξη.			

7. What is your general opinion concerning the use of Greek by the teacher during the English lesson? What are the advantages and the disadvantages? / Ποιά είναι η γενική σου άποψη σχετικά με την χρήση των Ελληνικών από τον/την καθηγητή/ρια στο μάθημα των Αγγλικών; Ποιά είναι τα πλεονεκτήματα και τα μειονεκτήματα;

**PART III -Tick (v)/ ΜΕΡΟΣ III- Σημείωσε v**

What should happen.../ Τι πρέπει να συμβαίνει...

	Agree/ Συμφωνώ	Disagree/ Διαφωνώ	Don't know/ Δεν Ξέρω
The teacher should use Greek when /Ο/ Η καθηγητής/ρια πρέπει να χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά όταν			
1. explaining grammar/ εξηγεί γραμματική			
2. defining new vocabulary/ ερμηνεύει καινούριο λεξιλόγιο			
3. explaining pronunciation/ εξηγεί την προφορά λέξεων			
4. teaching or explaining reading and text comprehension/ διδάσκει ή εξηγεί κατανόηση και επεξεργασία κειμένου			
5. teaching or explaining writing/ διδάσκει ή εξηγεί γράψιμο (έκθεσης, παραγράφου, γράμματος κτλ)			
6. interacting informally with the students (joking, socialising etc)/ συναναστρέφεται ανεπίσημα με τους μαθητές (αστεία, κοινωνικοποίηση κτλ)			
7. giving instructions (for activities, tests etc)/ δίνει οδηγίες (για δραστηριότητες, διαγωνίσματα κτλ)			

8. Are there any other instances in which you think that Greek should be used by the teacher during the English lesson? / Σε ποιες άλλες περιπτώσεις πιστεύεις ότι ο καθηγητής/ρια πρέπει να χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά κατά την διάρκεια του μαθήματος των Αγγλικών;

**PART IV - Give an estimate, choosing A, B, C, D, or E from the following/ ΜΕΡΟΣ IV- Δώσε μια εκτίμηση, διαλέγοντας A, B, C, D, ή E από τα ακόλουθα**

**A: 1-20% B: 21-40% C: 41-60% D: 61- 80% E: 81-100%**

What actually happens... / Τι πραγματικά συμβαίνει...

1. My teacher uses Greek to explain grammar about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing or working on this. / Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά για να εξηγήσει γραμματική περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνουμε σε αυτό.
2. My teacher uses Greek to define new vocabulary about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing or working on this./ Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά για να εξηγήσει καινούριο λεξιλόγιο περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνουμε σε αυτό.
3. My teacher uses Greek to teach pronunciation about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend working on this. /Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά για να εξηγή την προφορά λέξεων περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνουμε σε αυτό.
4. My teacher uses Greek to explain reading and text comprehension about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend working on this. /Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά για να εξηγήσει επεξεργασία και κατανόηση κειμένου περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνουμε σε αυτό.
5. My teacher uses Greek to teach writing about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing or working on this. /Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά για να διδάξει γραφή κειμένου περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνουμε σε αυτό.
6. My teacher uses Greek to communicate with the students informally (jokes, socialising etc) about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend on these. /Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά όταν συναναστρέφεται ανεπίσημα με τους μαθητές (αστεία, κοινωνικοποίηση κτλ) περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνουμε σε αυτό.
7. My teacher uses Greek to give us instructions for tests, quizzes and other assignments about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing these./ Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά για να δώσει οδηγίες για διαγωνίσματα, κουίζ και άλλες εργασίες περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνουμε σε αυτό.
8. My teacher uses Greek to discipline the students about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time she/he spends on this. /Ο/Η καθηγητής/ρια μου χρησιμοποιεί Ελληνικά για να πειθαρχήσει τους μαθητές περίπου \_\_\_\_\_ % του χρόνου που αφιερώνει σε αυτό.

**Thank you very much!**

## Appendix B

### Questions Used in Teacher Interviews

#### Teacher Background

1. Please tell me about your teaching experience. How long have you been teaching English?
2. How do you feel about your proficiency in spoken English?
3. Do you feel as comfortable speaking English as you do when you speak Greek?
4. Do you use the two languages (English and Greek) for different purposes?

#### Perception of students' ability

5. What do you think about your students' ability in English?
6. When you speak English, how well do you think your students understand?

#### Philosophy of Teaching

7. What is your opinion concerning the use of English and Greek in the foreign language classroom? How much of English and Greek should be used by the teacher?

#### Ministry Policy

8. What guidelines or requirements has the school/ the ministry given you on how to teach English?
9. Is there a policy concerning the use of Greek in the English language learning classroom?
10. Have you taken any training by the ministry regarding the use of L1 and L2 in the EFL classroom?

#### Teachers' practices/ opinion

11. What is your general opinion concerning the use of Greek by the teacher during the English lesson? What are the advantages and the disadvantages?
12. In which of the following instances do you believe that the use of Greek by the teacher is essential?
  - a. Teaching/ explaining grammar \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Defining new vocabulary \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Teaching/ explaining pronunciation \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Teaching/ explaining reading and text comprehension \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Teaching/ explaining writing \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Disciplining the students \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Interacting informally with the students (joking, socialising etc) \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. Organising classroom activities \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. Giving feedback \_\_\_\_\_
  - j. Helping students understand \_\_\_\_\_
  - k. Explaining instructions/ exercises in tests \_\_\_\_\_
  - l. Group work/ Pair work \_\_\_\_\_

13. Which (of the following) factors influence your use of Greek in class?

- a. Students' behaviour \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Your self-confidence when using the TL \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Students' skills in the TL \_\_\_\_\_
- d. How tired you are on a given day \_\_\_\_\_
- e. The year group you are teaching \_\_\_\_\_
- f. The type of the activity \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Ministry policy \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Review of research results in the area of TEFL \_\_\_\_\_
- i. Students who ask the teachers to use their L1 \_\_\_\_\_
- j. Students who tell you they don't understand \_\_\_\_\_
- k. Time constraints \_\_\_\_\_

14. Please give an estimate, choosing A, B, C, D, or E from the following

A: 0-20% B: 21-40% C: 41-60% D: 61- 80% E: 81-100%

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- 9. I use Greek to explain grammar about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing or working on this.
- 10. I use Greek to define new vocabulary about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing or working on this.
- 11. I use Greek to teach pronunciation about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend working on this.
- 12. I use Greek to explain reading and text comprehension about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend working on this.
- 13. I use Greek to teach writing about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing or working on this.
- 14. I use Greek to communicate with the students informally (jokes, socialising etc) about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend on these.
- 15. I use Greek to give instructions for tests, quizzes and other assignments about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time we spend discussing these.
- 16. I use Greek to discipline the students about \_\_\_\_\_% of the time I spend on this.

**Appendix C**

**Table 4. Correlation between reported amount of L1 use and students' age**

			1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
<b>For all Teachers</b>		Age	My teacher uses L1 to explain grammar	My teacher uses L1 to define new vocabulary	My teacher uses L1 to teach pronunciation	My teacher uses L1 to explain reading comprehension	My teacher uses L1 to teach writing	My teacher uses L1 to communicate with the Ss informally	My teacher uses L1 to give instructions for tests etc.	My teacher uses L1 to discipline the Ss
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	-.128	-.296**	-.268**	-.300**	-.206*	-.038	-.180	-.175
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.213	.004	.009	.003	.045	.710	.078	.089
	N	96	96	95	95	94	95	96	96	96
My teacher uses L1 to explain grammar	Pearson Correlation	-.128	1	.583**	.454**	.422**	.541**	.367**	.450**	.383**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.213		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	96	96	95	95	94	95	96	96	96
My teacher uses L1 to define new vocabulary	Pearson Correlation	-.296**	.583**	1	.533**	.591**	.521**	.359**	.659**	.300**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.003
	N	95	95	95	95	93	95	95	95	95
My teacher uses L1 to teach pronunciation	Pearson Correlation	-.268**	.454**	.533**	1	.580**	.559**	.158	.433**	.206*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.000	.000		.000	.000	.126	.000	.045

	N	95	95	95	95	93	95	95	95	95
My teacher uses L1 to explain reading and text comprehension	Pearson Correlation	-.300**	.422**	.591**	.580**	1	.713**	.242*	.632**	.380**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000	.000		.000	.019	.000	.000
	N	94	94	93	93	94	93	94	94	94
My teacher uses L1 to teach writing	Pearson Correlation	-.206*	.541**	.521**	.559**	.713**	1	.356**	.520**	.296**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.004
	N	95	95	95	95	93	95	95	95	95
My teacher uses L1 to communicate with the Ss informally	Pearson Correlation	-.038	.367**	.359**	.158	.242*	.356**	1	.315**	.498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.710	.000	.000	.126	.019	.000		.002	.000
	N	96	96	95	95	94	95	96	96	96
My teacher uses L1 to give instructions for tests etc.	Pearson Correlation	-.180	.450**	.659**	.433**	.632**	.520**	.315**	1	.442**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.078	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.002		.000
	N	96	96	95	95	94	95	96	96	96
My teacher uses L1 to discipline the Ss	Pearson Correlation	-.175	.383**	.300**	.206*	.380**	.296**	.498**	.442**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.089	.000	.003	.045	.000	.004	.000	.000	
	N	96	96	95	95	94	95	96	96	96

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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