

Anna Szuchalska

University of Białystok, Poland

e-mail: a.szuchalska@uwb.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-2358-0696

Marzena Wysocka-Narewska

University of Silesia, Poland

e-mail: marzena.wysocka-narewska@us.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-2787-8676

TRANSLANGUAGING IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE: THE USE OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE ACROSS DIFFERENT LESSON STAGES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Abstract. This study investigates the role of the first language (L1) in foreign language instruction, with particular attention to translanguaging practices across different lesson stages. A total of 98 foreign language teachers participated in the study by completing an anonymous online questionnaire. The instrument consisted of four sections: demographic and professional background, reported frequency of L1 use across lesson stages, perceptions of L1 functions, and attitudes towards translanguaging. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Spearman's rho correlations. The findings indicate that L1 is used selectively rather than systematically, most often to clarify grammar, vocabulary, and instructions, and to support less proficient learners. Teachers' linguistic background (mother tongue) was significantly associated with frequency of L1 use, whereas teaching experience and institutional context were not. A positive correlation was also found between teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging and their reported L1 use, underscoring the importance of teacher beliefs in shaping practice. The study highlights the pedagogical value of translanguaging and calls for teacher education programmes that address its role in inclusive language teaching.

Keywords: translanguaging, first language use, foreign language teaching, teacher beliefs, multilingual pedagogy, classroom practices.

1. Introduction

Recent developments in multilingualism research have foregrounded *translanguaging* as a central concept for understanding how speakers deploy their full linguistic repertoires in meaning-making. Rather than treating languages as discrete, bounded systems, translanguaging conceptualises linguistic practice as fluid, dynamic, and situated, emphasising the mobiliza-

tion of semiotic resources across named-language boundaries (García & Li Wei, 2014). This perspective differs from related notions such as *languageing* – the processual act of creating meaning – and *translingualism*, an ideological stance emphasising the permeability of languages. Within education, translanguaging frames learners' L1 not as an obstacle but as an affordance that can support deeper comprehension, scaffold new knowledge, and promote inclusive pedagogy.

Despite extensive discussions of L1 use in foreign language classrooms, empirical work examining when and how teachers draw on the L1 during specific lesson stages remains limited. Much of the existing scholarship addresses L1 use globally, without differentiating patterns across phases such as warm-up, presentation, practice, or feedback, which are central to instructional design. Moreover, although translanguaging theory highlights the importance of teacher beliefs in shaping classroom practice, few studies have investigated whether teachers' attitudes toward translanguaging correspond to their actual pedagogical behaviours, or how teacher characteristics – particularly linguistic background – relate to L1 use. The present study addresses these gaps by analysing L1 use across discrete lesson stages and examining the associations between teachers' linguistic profiles, attitudes, and reported instructional practices.

2. Literature review

Translanguaging: definition

The roots of translanguaging research are to be found in bilingual education in Wales and specifically in the work of Cen Williams (1994). In its original form, *trawsieithu*, covering a language practice that implied the planned and systematic use of two languages within the same lesson, translanguaging occurs where a lesson input (receptive/passive skills, e.g., reading materials, teacher conversation) and the output (productive/active skills, e.g., written work, group discussion) are varied deliberately, and in an organised manner, between the various languages (García, 2009). In its expanded sense, it refers to the natural and normal ways bilinguals mix and use their languages in their everyday lives without adherence to the boundaries of 'named' languages to make sense of their bilingual worlds. In teaching, on the other hand, the term refers to pedagogical practices that use a combination of two languages (L1 and L2) as a resource rather than ignore it or perceive it as a problem. Last but not least, cognitively speaking, it is a process that allows an individual to internalise information from one language in order to be able to use that information to inform their output in another language.

Pedagogical translanguaging

Pedagogical translanguaging is closely linked to the original understanding of the term as applied in bilingual schools in Wales (Lewis et al., 2012; Williams, 1994), where the employment of Welsh and English was carefully planned, and the two languages were systematically integrated within the same lesson. In more recent definitions, though, it seems to be a more flexible approach that allows multilingual learners to shuttle between languages in an innate manner (Coneh, 2018), and educate all learners, regardless of their language practices, to maximize the meaning making, creativity and criticality of their educational experience” (Garcia, 2019, pp. 370–371).

Principles of pedagogical translanguaging

According to Cenoz and Gorter (2021), the classroom translanguaging can be conceived of as built on the following principles:

- It can be applied not only to two languages, as in Wales, but also to three or more languages and even to students’ home languages, which are not in the school curriculum,
- It proposes a wide range of practices and activities that use elements from the whole linguistic repertoire. These practices and activities can have different functions which include obtaining a deeper understanding of academic texts, access to more information, the development of metalinguistic awareness and the reinforcement of skills based on the coordination of activities in the language classes in different languages,
- It can be applied to more programmes and a wide range of students in all levels of education.

In the Polish context, pedagogical translanguaging means withdrawing from the sterility of the English classroom in which a native speaker of some kind is a frame of reference, because the perfect knowledge of a language is no longer the objective of foreign language learning (Kucharczyk & Szymankiewicz, 2016, p. 67). This goes in line with the idea of partial competences, or uneven proficiency of the plurilingual language learner/ user (cf. the CEFR, p. 36ff). Code-switching and inter-comprehension are believed to offer good learning opportunities rather than depriving students of communication opportunities while language mixing, in this context, is likely to be perceived as a communication strategy, the result of partial competence or, sometimes, a sign of linguistic creativity (Lankiewicz, 2020). Subsequently, to build on CEFR, it is natural for an English classroom to contain voices derived from other languages, be it students’ L1 or any other linguistic systems that represent their linguistic repertoires.

L1 use in the L2 classroom

Teacher L1 use in the classroom

When it comes to teachers and ways in which they use L1 in the classroom, these can be broadly divided into *core functions* and *social functions* (Macaro et al., 2011). Core functions are concerned with the teaching of language where L1 is ordinarily limited to explaining grammar and vocabulary, as well as checking understanding of the two phonological systems. Social functions, on the other hand, are related to L1 and the management of the classroom. These, as a rule, include managing personal relationships (e.g., building rapport, maintaining discipline), giving instructions, and dealing with administrative matters.

Reasons for L1 use

From a more-detailed perspective, though, there exist three main situations supporting the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom, namely, providing explanations for activities or tasks aiding in classroom management, supporting grammar instruction and translating vocabulary, and reducing affective barriers and building rapport between teachers and students.

Providing explanations for activities or tasks aiding in classroom management

Among the research, the most commonly mentioned reason for L1 use in second language is for *task explanation aiding in classroom management*. In his findings, Macaro (2001) notes that occasional recourse to L1 in order to set up a complex activity is always useful and provides students with extra learning opportunities since providing instructions in the L1 creates a sort of bridge between the unattainable and the attainable. Bruen and Kelly (2017) report that L1 use for activity instructions aids in comprehension and alleviates confusion. Additionally, in their study, Swain and Lapkin (2000), prove that L1 simply helps move the task along and, hence, saves a lot of lesson time, which is crucial for managerial purposes. In addition to task explanations, researchers have found that L1 is useful for maintaining control of both the class and of lessons (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Macaro, 2001), as well as for ease of communicating discipline to students. In addition to maintaining order in the classroom, the L1 seems useful for making classroom management more efficient (Cook, 2001; Polio & Duff, 1994). This may range from L1 use at the beginning of the semester by explaining grading policies and giving tips for functioning within the group to dealing with malfunctioning classroom equipment, and other types of emergencies.

Supporting grammar instruction and translating vocabulary

The second reason, that is, L1 use in the context of *language assistance*, is most often related to grammar and vocabulary. The main reasons for L1 use concerning grammar and vocabulary are again clarification and comprehension. What is more, the use of the L1 for grammar instruction is often connected to the concept of metalanguage, or using grammatical terms to discuss and comprehend grammatical forms. This can be supported by the findings of Carson (2014) who shows that students prefer having L1 support for grammar comprehension in general, not restricting it to complex issues exclusively or Turnbull (2001) admitting that “it is efficient to make a quick switch to the L1 to ensure that students understand a difficult grammar concept or unknown word”, particularly in cases of L2-specific idiomatic expressions or false friends. As far as using L1 for vocabulary translation and comprehension is concerned, it is considered most efficient for introducing new words (Turnbull, 2001), which is believed to help students “access the meaning of words ... [and] also facilitates memorization” Also, underline students with low proficiency levels express the greatest need for defining new vocabulary in the L1 (Carson & Kashihara, 2012). At the meaning level, L1 as CF can assist students in negotiating sentence meanings and generating English sentences, thereby improving their language fluency. Finally and most importantly, L1 has been proved a powerful tool for error correction exercises, especially when used strategically to highlight differences and facilitate understanding of the target language (L2). By comparing and contrasting L1 and L2, learners can gain a deeper understanding of grammatical structures, vocabulary usage, and potential interference points (Wang & Xu, 2024).

Reducing affective barriers and building rapport between teachers and students

The final reason for L1 usage is *reducing affective barriers and building rapport* between teachers and students in the classroom. In the context of affective barriers, the use of learners’ native language can help reduce anxiety and stress, make the learning environment more enjoyable, foster confidence, and build a positive rapport between teachers and students, which is highly important in developing student motivation and achievement outcomes (Dörnyei, 1994; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). Unlike the previous cognitive and pedagogical reasons for L1 use, reducing affective barriers can help students (Brown, 2014) become more productive and active language learners simply because of a comfort zone guaranteeing them the opportunity

to use L1 for personal matters, while being emotional or any other off-task behaviour (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Last but not least, Ford (2009) as well as de la Campa and Nassaji (2009) emphasize the fact that the majority of teachers use L1 for humour that is widely claimed to lighten load in the classroom, and promote creativity (Tong & Tsung 2020).

Taken together, research indicates that teachers employ the L1 primarily when the cognitive or managerial load of an activity exceeds learners' current proficiency. L1 use thus emerges as a strategic response to momentary instructional demands rather than a habitual practice, enabling teachers to facilitate comprehension, ensure procedural clarity, and maintain lesson flow. This pattern suggests that L1-related decisions are shaped by pedagogical reasoning guided by efficiency, clarity, and learner support.

L1 use across different lesson stages

Being a popular and straightforward framework often found in EFL coursebooks, the PPP model offers a lesson structure recommended for FL teaching divided into presentation, practice and production (Ur, 1999).

- **Presentation:**

Following Crookes (2003), at this particular stage the teacher introduces the new language (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, or a functional phrase) in context, explaining its meaning, form, and pronunciation. This may involve using visual aids, audio clips, or real-life examples. L1 can be used strategically to clarify meaning, explain vocabulary, grammar rules, or introduce a new topic, especially for beginners or when dealing with difficult concepts.

- **Practice:**

In controlled practice, students engage in highly structured activities to practice the new language. This might include drills, gap-fill exercises, matching activities, or sentence completion tasks. The focus is on accuracy and getting comfortable with the new language form. Using L1 in controlled practice is most often restricted to instructing and correcting learners. In semi-controlled practice, in turn, which gives learners a balance between accuracy and fluency helping them to personalize language while still adhering to certain guidelines, L1 can be used judiciously, potentially for clarifying instructions, providing support and delayed feedback. In free practice, referred to as prioritizing content over form, and promoting authentic language use in a meaningful discourse, L1 is likely to take on the form of fostering a positive atmosphere, encouraging student engagement and providing any type of help needed.

- **Production:**

At the production stage, learners use the new language more freely in communicative activities, such as role-plays, discussions, or short presentations. The emphasis shifts from accuracy to fluency and using the language in a more natural context (Crookes & Chaudron, 1991). Thus, it is advisable to minimize L1 use and confine it to facilitating the pace of the task completion as well as solving learners' problems.

Overall, as Macaro (2009) states "Optimal use of codeswitching lies not in complete exclusion of the L1 but in principled decisions about when it best serves learning" (p. 45).

Common factors influencing classroom L1 usage

To build on Macaro (2005), factors contributing to L1 use in the classroom can be divided into learner-related, teacher-related and context-related ones.

Learner related factors

L2 proficiency

L2 learner proficiency is frequently cited as an important factor in determining classroom language choice (cf. Du, 2016; JeeYoung Shin et al., 2020; Jinxia, 2010). A significant amount of research has been gathered in favour of L1 use in the case of lower proficiency learners, emphasis being put on a large proportion of beginners (66%) and intermediate (58%) learners believing that the teacher should use their native language in the classroom (Hall & Cook, 2013). The most frequent uses were consulting or studying bilingual word lists or dictionaries, comparing English grammar to the grammar of their own language, and watching English language videos with L1 subtitles. The next most frequent use of L1 was to prepare for tasks and activities before actually carrying out the task in English.

Ambiguity of tolerance

Dewaele and Shan Ip (2013) found that students who are less tolerant of L2 ambiguity, that is, experiencing stress when faced with uncertain or complex situations, are more anxious in their EFL classes and feel less proficient in a language. As it has been proved that the use of L1 support alleviates AT-related anxiety, the primary role of a teacher in tense situations is to introduce L1 whenever necessary to combat a stressful atmosphere to enable learners to explore and go beyond the limits of their language competence. Most often, L1 uses cover occasions on which FL learners encounter

new linguistic structures, cultural contexts, and potentially ambiguous information.

Motivation

The suitability of L1 support in the L2 classroom has also been linked to learner L2 motivation (e.g., Suzuki, 2020). Since it has been confirmed that the prohibition of the L1 implies the abandonment of learners' culture and language (Auerbach, 1993) having negative repercussions for motivation and morale, the provision of L1 support is believed to create a positive learning environment. As noted by Ellis (2012, p. 128), "theories of L2 motivation...lend support to the use of the L1 as a means of... creating rapport in the classroom", making learners who are unresponsive, inattentive and/or unwilling to speak actively participate in the classroom.

Gender

Regarding the desire for L1 classroom support, there are also indications that gender-based differences play a role (Clark & Trafford, 1996; Kissau & Salas, 2013). For instance, male learners have been found to react more negatively than females towards the teacher exclusively using the L2. The latest research, though, suggests that that female students are found to be more inclined to use L1 for building rapport and seeking support, while male students to interrupting or dominating conversations.

Across studies, learner proficiency, tolerance of ambiguity, motivation, and emotional needs consistently influence how and why the L1 becomes a resource. These findings underscore that L1 use is rarely uniform across groups; rather, it adapts to learners' profiles and classroom dynamics. Understanding these learner-mediated variations is therefore crucial for interpreting teachers' L1 practices within a translanguaging perspective.

Teacher related factors

Teacher beliefs about L1 use in the L2 classroom

The research exploring the reasons behind teachers' decisions to use L1 accentuates instructors' beliefs about L1 use in the L2 classroom (Lee, 2016). As Borg (2006) points out it is teachers who are "active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs" (p. 272). The opinions held by non-native speaker teachers or teacher trainees who share their L1 with their learners are more in favor of the L1 in L2 teaching than the trainees. This points to an impact of teaching experience, involving the knowledge of the realities of

actual classroom teaching, and is in line with Hall and Cook's (2013, p. 24) conviction that with practice, teachers become more pragmatic and less dogmatic in their attitudes toward L1 use. In Tetiurka's (2016) study involving Polish EFL teacher trainee beliefs, high levels of L1 appreciation were revealed, especially due to L1 facilitation manifested in teaching grammar and vocabulary, disciplining students, and providing complex explanations. Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) emphasize that "The mother tongue is the master key to foreign languages: it is our most important ally" (p. 242).

Collectively, these studies reveal that teachers' beliefs constitute a key determinant of classroom language choice. Translanguaging-oriented practices are more prevalent when teachers view the L1 as a pedagogical asset, whereas monolingual ideologies constrain L1 use even when it may benefit learners. Teacher cognition thus plays a central role in mediating translanguaging enactment.

Context related factors

To build on Hall and Cook (2012), it is the lesson framework that often influences L1 use in the classroom. As Macaro (2001) observes, most influences appear to derive from the lesson structure, and include the very lesson stage, its length, time of the day as well as external classroom conditions.

Lesson stage

As previously mentioned, the presentation phase of the lesson composed of explanation and clarification makes use of L1 when introducing complex concepts or vocabulary, especially those with abstract meanings to easily and efficiently convey meaning, saving time and preventing frustration. Another stage to which L1 use is almost naturally aligned to involves the feedback/correction time. Usually, L1 is used to provide clear and concise information on student work especially when he/she struggles a lot to understand the necessary corrections in the L2. Tang (2002) stresses the importance of using L1 while checking students' comprehension, explaining complex grammar points and giving instructions. Generally, it is true in the light of what Kim and Elder (2008) highlight that although "native speaker teachers overwhelmingly reported that the target language should be used as much as possible, yet in practice, the L1 remained a necessary resource for certain functions" (p. 239).

Lesson length

As numerous studies show, for shorter lessons, L1 use might be more prevalent to quickly address misunderstandings or provide concise instructions. Also, it is recommended to use learners' native language for orga-

nizational issues. In longer lessons, on the other hand, a balance can be struck, with L1 used strategically to support learning rather than dominate the lesson. As a rule, L1 is exploited as an important psychological resource for L2 teaching depending on the lesson objective, generally enhancing learners' positive attitudes towards TL (Littlewood, 2014).

Time of the day

Since students often have higher energy levels and better focus at the beginning of the day, teachers can schedule more challenging activities during this time, which immediately resonates with extended L1 use to facilitate communication, idea sharing, and mutual support among learners, enhancing their learning experience. Yet another situation of L1 usage is while implementing engaging activities. Here, the teacher is likely to resort to learners' L1 both when on-task and off-task as a scaffolding tool to complete the task (Auerbach, 2016). Later in the day, when students' concentration decreases, L1 takes on motivating and explanatory functions.

External conditions

According to Levine (2003) and Song (2009), these include the attitudes and practice of school managers and policy makers. It might be the case that the school administrator decides about the possibility of using the native language in the classroom, and, if allowed, it is the institution regulations that precisely determine the methods of switching the language code (L1-L2 and L2-L1). However, according to Levine (2011), teachers' decisions about when to use the first language or the target language are shaped by a range of factors, such as instructional aims, learner requirements, and classroom interactions, rather than being determined solely by institutional guidelines (p. 57).

Regardless of the factors mentioned above, the use of L1 in an FL setting carries both recognised benefits and well-documented limitations (Włosowicz, 2020). On the positive side, L1 often functions as a valuable facilitating tool: it enhances learners' comprehension by quickly clarifying difficult vocabulary and abstract concepts, provides a supportive foundation for understanding complex grammatical structures, and contributes to more effective classroom management by enabling teachers to offer clear instructions and maintain discipline. It also strengthens teacher-student rapport and serves as a scaffold that allows learners to focus on the task itself rather than on overcoming linguistic barriers. Moreover, by reducing anxiety and meeting learners' affective needs, L1 can increase motivation and boost confidence.

At the same time, numerous concerns have been raised regarding possible constraints on L1 usage (Mendoza, 2023). These reservations typically stem from the risk of insufficient exposure to the target language in FL contexts. Excessive L1 use may reduce opportunities for meaningful L2 practice, potentially hindering communicative competence and fluency. It can also foster over-reliance, whereby learners depend on their L1 even for simple ideas, which in turn may limit their confidence and autonomy in the FL. Furthermore, the presence of L1 can inhibit immersion, slowing natural acquisition processes and leading to slower overall progress if it replaces attempts to explain concepts through the target language.

Taken together, the literature suggests that the strategic and intentional use of L1 can be beneficial, provided that it does not detract from ensuring abundant L2 input and output, which remain essential for developing fluency and supporting immersive learning.

3. Methodology

Research aims and questions

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the role of teachers' first language (L1) in foreign language instruction across different educational contexts. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the frequency and patterns of L1 use in different stages of foreign language lessons.
2. Identify how L1 functions in a foreign language classroom.
3. Examine the relationship between teachers' professional characteristics (e.g., type of school, mother tongue, teaching experience) and their reported L1 practices.
4. Explore teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the pedagogical value of translanguaging.

To align with the research objectives, the following questions were formulated:

1. How frequently do foreign language teachers report using the L1 at different stages of the lesson (e.g., warm-up, grammar explanation, feedback, classroom management)?
2. What are the functions of L1 in a foreign language classroom?
3. Is there a relationship between teachers' background variables (mother tongue, type of school, years of teaching experience) and their reported frequency of L1 use?

- 4. What are foreign language teachers’ attitudes towards translanguaging?
- 5. Do teachers’ attitudes towards translanguaging correlate with the actual frequency of their L1 use in the classroom?

Participants

Participants’ characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant characteristics (N = 98)

Variable	Category	n	%
Mother tongue	Arabic (varieties)	45	45.9
	Polish	6	6.1
	Vietnamese	6	6.1
	English	5	5.1
	Spanish	4	4.1
	Other (single cases)	32	32.7
Type of school	Secondary school	38	38.8
	University	33	33.7
	Other	12	12.2
	Primary school	9	9.2
	Language school	6	6.1
Teaching experience	0–5	47	48.0
	6–10	19	19.4
	11–15	9	9.2
	16–20	8	8.2
	Over 20	15	15.3

Source: Own study.

The analysis of the data in Table 1 shows that a total of 98 foreign language teachers participated in the study. The largest linguistic background group consisted of speakers of Arabic varieties (including Moroccan Darija and related dialects), representing almost half of the sample. Other substantial groups included teachers with Polish (about 6%), Vietnamese (about 6%), English (about 5%), and Spanish (about 4%) as their mother tongue, alongside a wide range of less frequently reported languages (e.g. Chinese, Italian, Malay, Thai, etc.). In terms of institutional background, participants represented diverse contexts: secondary schools (39%), universities (34%), as well as primary schools (9%), private language schools (6%), and other educational institutions (12%). The largest group

of participants were teachers with 0–5 years of teaching experience (48%), followed by those with 6–10 years of experience (19%). A smaller proportion were highly experienced teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience (15%).

Procedure

The study was conducted in the spring of 2025. The study employed a self-administered questionnaire as the main research tool. It was distributed online via Google Forms, which allowed participants to access it conveniently at any time and from any location. Respondents were informed about the anonymity of their answers and the voluntary nature of their participation. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first captured demographic and professional information, including mother tongue, institutional context, and years of teaching experience. The second section assessed the frequency of L1 use across lesson stages using a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always). Sample items included: *“I use the L1 during the warm-up stage”* and *“I use the L1 when giving feedback or correcting errors.”* The third section elicited teachers’ beliefs about the functions of L1 in the foreign language classroom (e.g., *“Using the L1 helps clarify complex grammar points”*), rated on a 1–5 agreement scale. The final section measured attitudes toward translanguaging, including items such as *“Translanguaging supports language acquisition”* and *“Teachers should be trained in intentional translanguaging practices.”* This structure enabled the systematic examination of teachers’ backgrounds, reported behaviours, and pedagogical orientations.

Data analysis

The collected data were subjected to statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to establish the frequency of L1 use across lesson stages and to summarise participants’ beliefs and attitudes. Correlational analyses (Spearman’s rho) were employed to explore relationships between teacher background variables, attitudes, and reported practices.

Research findings

The following section presents the main research findings, structured around the topics included in the questionnaire and corresponding to the research questions addressed above.

The first research question concerned the frequency and patterns of L1 use in different stages of foreign language lessons. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Distribution of outcomes in the field of frequency of L1 use during lesson stages

Statement	1 – never, 5 – always				
	1	2	3	4	5
Warm-up/organisational instruction	41.8	24.5	20.4	5.1	8.2
Presentation of new material	19.4	33.7	32.7	9.2	5.1
Practice phase	33.7	34.7	15.3	11.2	5.1
Pair/group work	26.5	33.7	16.3	13.3	10.2
Error correction	22.4	25.5	24.5	19.4	8.2
Lesson summary/reflection	42.9	19.4	15.3	15.3	7.1
Assigning homework	37.8	23.5	14.3	15.3	9.2

* Data presented as proportion of all outcomes for given statement.

Source: own study.

As shown in Table 2, teachers reported predominantly occasional use of the L1 across all lesson stages. Responses clustered around the lower to mid-points of the scale (1–3), indicating that the L1 was generally employed as a supplementary rather than routine instructional resource. No single lesson stage showed substantially higher reliance on the L1; instead, patterns suggested selective and context-dependent use aligned with momentary instructional needs.

The second research question focused on how L1 functions in a foreign language classroom. The findings are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Distribution of outcomes in the field of L1 functions in a foreign language classroom

Statement	1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree				
	1	2	3	4	5
I use L1 to explain complex grammar points	19.4	18.4	20.4	21.4	20.4
L1 helps me manage the classroom effectively	20.4	19.4	27.6	20.4	12.2
I use L1 to explain vocabulary and instructions	16.3	29.6	22.4	18.4	13.3
I avoid L1 to maximize students' exposure to the target language	11.2	13.3	15.3	23.5	36.7
L1 helps less proficient students understand lesson content	10.2	16.3	24.5	25.5	23.5
I use L1 and L2 strategically during lessons	13.3	16.3	17.3	22.4	30.6

* Data presented as proportion of all outcomes for given statement.

Source: own study.

As indicated by the data analysis in Table 3, with regard to the functions of the L1 in a foreign language classroom, teachers reported using it primarily for clarification, especially to explain complex grammar points (20.4%) and to help less proficient students comprehend lesson content (23.5%). Generally, teachers either avoided using students' mother tongue to maximize their exposure to the target language (36.7%) or used L1 and L2 interchangeably during various lesson stages (30.6%). Overall, the distribution again revealed a tendency towards moderate use, with the majority of responses falling in the middle of the scale. These findings indicate that while the L1 is not excluded, its functions are selective and context-driven.

The following research question examined the relationship between teachers' professional characteristics (e.g., type of school, mother tongue, teaching experience) and their reported L1 practices. The results are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4
Spearman's rho correlations between teacher characteristics and frequency of L1 use (N = 98)

Teacher characteristic	Spearman's rho	p-value
Mother tongue	0.383	0.000
Teaching experience	−0.022	0.847
Type of school	−0.013	0.898

Source: own study.

Based on the data provided in Table 4, several conclusions can be drawn. The correlation analysis revealed that mother tongue was moderately and significantly correlated with L1 use, $\rho = .38$, $p < .001$. This suggests that teachers' linguistic backgrounds played a meaningful role in shaping how frequently they used the L1 in their teaching. Teaching experience showed no significant correlation with L1 use, $\rho = -.02$, $p = .85$. This indicates that teachers with fewer years of experience reported similar levels of L1 use to those with many years in the profession. Type of school also showed no significant relationship with L1 use, $\rho = -.01$, $p = .90$, suggesting that institutional context (e.g., primary, secondary, university, or private language school) did not influence reported frequency of L1 use. In summary, teachers' linguistic background was the only variable significantly associated with L1 use, whereas professional experience and institutional setting showed no meaningful effect.

Research question number four explored foreign language teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging. The findings are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5
Distribution of outcomes in the field of foreign language teachers’ attitudes towards translanguageing

Statement	1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree				
	1	2	3	4	5
Translanguaging supports language acquisition	9.2	23.5	21.4	26.5	19.4
Mixing languages is a natural part of language learning	14.3	15.3	18.4	25.5	26.5
Using L1 in class shows a teacher’s linguistic inadequacy	49.0	20.4	14.3	11.2	5.1
Translanguaging is a valuable pedagogical tool	7.1	16.3	21.4	22.4	32.7
Teachers should be trained in intentional translanguageing practices	5.1	10.2	20.4	25.5	38.8

* Data presented as proportion of all outcomes for given statement.
Source: own study.

The analysis of the data in Table 5 indicates that the answers in the section on attitudes towards translanguageing showed more variation. While some teachers expressed neutral or cautious views, others strongly agreed with statements emphasising the value of the L1 as a pedagogical tool (32.7%). The overall distribution suggests a moderate but positive orientation towards translanguageing, with a significant proportion of teachers recognising its potential benefits. In general, a great number of educators (38.8%) believe that some kind of formal training on intentional translanguageing practices should be provided.

The final research question examined whether teachers’ attitudes towards translanguageing correlate with the actual frequency of their L1 use in the classroom. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Spearman’s rho correlation between attitudes towards translanguageing and frequency of L1 use (N = 98)

Variable pair	N	Spearman’s rho	p-value
Attitudes ↔ L1 use	98	.27	.01

Source: own study.

Based on the data in Table 6 regarding whether teachers’ attitudes were related to practice, a small but statistically significant positive correlation

was found, $\rho = .27$, $p = .01$. Teachers who held more favorable attitudes towards translanguaging tended to report somewhat greater use of the L1 in their classrooms.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the notion of translanguaging in a foreign language classroom.

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' reported use of the first language (L1) in foreign language classrooms, the influence of background variables, and the relationship between attitudes towards translanguaging and actual practices.

The findings revealed that teachers reported occasional use of the L1 across different lesson stages, with mean scores consistently below the mid-point of the scale. This pattern is consistent with earlier studies showing that teachers rarely exclude the L1 entirely but employ it selectively, often for clarification or classroom management (Macaro, 2009; Hall & Cook, 2012). Such selective use supports the view that while the target language should remain central, the L1 continues to serve as a useful pedagogical resource when employed strategically (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009).

Contrary to assumptions that less experienced teachers rely more heavily on the L1 due to limited classroom management strategies, the present study found no significant association between L1 use and teaching experience or institutional context. These findings align with Levine's (2011) argument that broader contextual factors do not necessarily predict language choice during instruction. In contrast, teachers' linguistic backgrounds were significantly related to their reported L1 use, suggesting that the familiarity and accessibility of one's own L1 may facilitate translanguaging practices. This supports the view that teacher identity and linguistic repertoire influence pedagogical decisions, an insight consistent with Littlewood and Yu's (2011) characterisation of translanguaging as embedded in teachers' own communicative resources.

The strongest and most consistent finding was the significant positive correlation between teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging and their reported L1 use. Teachers who expressed more favorable views about the pedagogical value of the L1 reported somewhat greater use in practice. This is in line with Borg's (2006) research on teacher cognition, which emphasises that beliefs and attitudes play a central role in shaping classroom behaviour. It also echoes findings by García and Li Wei (2014), who conceptualise

translanguaging as deeply embedded in teacher identity and orientation towards language pedagogy.

Implications

The findings of the study highlight the importance of teacher education programmes that explicitly address the role of the L1 and translanguaging. As the results suggest, it is not experience or institutional context but rather teacher beliefs that most strongly predict practice. Supporting teachers in developing reflective and research-informed attitudes towards translanguaging could therefore enhance inclusive and effective language pedagogy.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations. The use of self-reported data raises the possibility of social desirability bias. Future research should adopt a mixed-methods design, combining surveys with classroom observations or interviews, in order to triangulate reported and actual practices. Including learners' perspectives would also provide a more holistic view of how translanguaging operates in the classroom.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the use of the first language in foreign language classrooms by analysing the frequency of L1 use across lesson stages, exploring the functions teachers ascribe to L1, and investigating the relationship between teacher characteristics, attitudes toward translanguaging, and reported classroom practices. The findings showed that L1 use is occasional and selective, occurring across lesson stages primarily as a supportive resource for clarification, scaffolding, and efficient classroom management. Among teacher background variables, only mother tongue was significantly associated with L1 use, whereas teaching experience and institutional context were not. Importantly, teachers with more positive attitudes toward translanguaging reported more frequent use of the L1, underscoring the central role of teacher beliefs in shaping pedagogical behaviour.

These findings contribute to current discussions on multilingual pedagogy by demonstrating that translanguaging practices are influenced more by teachers' ideological orientations than by structural or institutional factors. Future research should combine self-report data with classroom observations and include learner perspectives to further illuminate how translanguaging operates as a dynamic pedagogical resource.

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