

Original Research

Spanish as a resource in the acquisition of English as a second language

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The use of the mother tongue in foreign language lessons has always generated a wide debate on whether the use of L1 prevents students from learning a L2. This research shows what teachers of English as L2 in Spain think about this topic. First, we review the reasons to exclude the use of Spanish, as well as the reasons for its inclusion. This approach includes linguistic, social, and cultural factors intrinsic to the teaching/learning process. Information is collected using a mixed method approach. On the one hand, a questionnaire is designed to identify patterns and trends regarding the use of Spanish in the English classroom considering factual, behavioural, and attitudinal data. Each section is linked to research objectives. On the other, three specific qualitative methods are used: personal interviews, small focus group discussions and extension written narratives, where 12 questions are composed as a basis for the realisation of these three methods. The results of the study suggest that a prudent and judicious use of Spanish does not prevent or hinder the development of English learning in students. On the contrary, in many cases, it facilitates it since it provides the teacher with a powerful pedagogical resource. The study posits that the judicious employment of Spanish within the classroom setting yields positive outcomes and advocates for increased flexibility in its utilisation. However, it simultaneously points to the imperative that this flexibility should not detract from the primary objective of English language acquisition. This study has theoretical and practical implications in the design of formation syllabi for in-service and future teachers of L2 in L1 contexts.

KEYWORDS: mother tongue, foreign language, language acquisition, English, pedagogical resource



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1. INTRODUCTION

This research deals with the use of the mother tongue (L1) in the foreign language (L2) classes, specifically Spanish within English language (L2) classrooms in Spain. The study explores the contentious spectrum from the belief that L1 hinders L2 acquisition to the view that L1 facilitates the validation of L2 learning. The practical realities of classroom instruction prompt a re-evaluation of L1's role in English language teaching, questioning whether bilingual educators should adopt a monolingual facade to deter students from reverting to L1. The aim of this research is to investigate how both learners and educators engage with L1 in the L2 learning environment, with a focus on Spanish

usage in English education across Spain. It seeks to understand teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards this issue, alongside the determinants that shape these views. The research thus addresses several key questions:

1. When and in what contexts do teachers engage with students using L1 within L2 instruction?
2. What attitudes do teachers hold towards the incorporation of L1 in L2 education?
3. How do teachers perceive institutional policies in Spanish schools regarding L1 usage in L2 classrooms?
4. What factors influence teachers' beliefs and opinions on the use of L1 in L2 teaching?

The hypotheses posited in relation to these questions include: 1. Teachers predominantly resort to L1 for explanations, instructions, and classroom management. 2. Most teachers acknowledge the practicality and advantages of L1 use. 3. Spanish educational institutions, particularly private ones, adhere to a stringent policy against L1 use in L2 settings. 4. Factors such as prior training, institutional policies, students' L1 proficiency, and educators' teaching experiences significantly impact their attitudes towards L1 use in L2 classrooms.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Methodology used for collection and subsequent analysis of data is intended to know teachers' different positions regarding the use of L1 in L2 lessons. Besides, there are possible deviations between what they think is correct and what they really do in the classroom. Different experiences and reflections provided are compared. As mentioned above, there are quite a few studies done on this debate at a global level. However, it is not so common to see studies on teachers of English as L2 who teach in Spain. A mixed-method approach has been carried out. The following instruments have been employed: questionnaires, personal interviews (focus group discussions), and extension written narratives. This method triangulation offers researchers a less biased and comprehensible analysis since data are based on teachers' own perceptions about using L1.

On the one hand, a questionnaire is designed to identify teachers' patterns and trends regarding the use of Spanish in the English classroom considering factual, behavioural, and attitudinal data (Dörnyei, 2003). Each section is linked to research objectives. On the other, three specific qualitative methods are used: personal interviews, small focus group discussions and extension written narratives, where 12 questions are composed as a basis for the realisation of these three methods. To select these questions, researchers analysed questionnaire responses to repeat or create new questions. In narratives, both oral and written, participants are given the opportunity to expand further on events and feelings. In personal interviews, explanations or clarifications may be requested, which is not possible in questionnaires. There are also people who prefer using the written word to reflect. The group interview is the most flexible and dynamic method since it involves more people, usually between 4 and 10. Participants speak freely and openly enter conversations where they share opinions and personal experiences. The interviewer takes on an observer role and uses questions to facilitate the speech.

The study has been carried out among teachers of English as L2 who currently work and live in Spain. Participants are teachers who use English in their lessons as the main means of communication, whether it is English itself or other subjects. The survey has been disseminated through interest groups via social networks, teachers' organisations in Spain, as well as teachers from public, private, and grant-maintained schools that fit the profile for this study. The result obtained was, for a survey period of 2 weeks, 140 people.

All participants are teachers between 23 and 53 years old currently working in language academies and schools. Of the 11 participants, 10 are women and 1 is male, comprising three nationalities: United States, Great Britain, and Spain. Most have taught English in Spain for more than 10 years, with the extremes being 3 years and 18 years of teaching in total. That is, it has been possible to talk and try to understand a wide spectrum of the existing possibilities. The personal interviews were individualised according to the experiences of each participant. Participation in the first questionnaire was voluntary. Although there were many people who initially offered to participate more actively in this study, only 11 people ultimately responded to requests to participate in interviews and written narratives.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Stern (1992) notes that '*neither in second language learning research nor in foreign language pedagogy has this issue so far been resolved, and it demands further exploration*' (Stern, 1992, p. 403). Ellis (1992, 1994) also highlights the lack of information to reach a conclusion on this debate. For his part, Atkinson (1987) points out this uncertainty in the methodological literature may cause confusion for teachers about using L1.

On the one hand, Atkinson (1993) points out the difficulty of determining the correct balance of L1 use, however, admits that it can be a positive resource if used sensibly and in certain situations. Auerbach (1993) believes English teachers should use L1 to help students improve L2 language skills: '*Starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learner lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English*' (Auerbach, 1993, p. 19). L1 can reduce anxiety and create a more relaxed environment. Auerbach (1993) adds teaching exclusively in English is based on scientific findings and argues '*we need to recognise that respect for learners' languages has powerful social implications*' (Auerbach, 1993, p. 30). In a study about the effects of Spanish (L1) in English lessons (L2), Schweers (1999) discovers '*students found it easier to cope with the L2 teacher if he/she can speak their mother tongue because this indicates how such a teacher appreciates the students' mother tongue*' (as cited in Almoayidi, 2018, p. 376).

Numerous empirical studies (Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002; Bouangeune, 2009; Kavaliauskiene, 2009; Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz, 2011; Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Timor, 2012; Mohbbi & Alavi, 2014) reveal L1 can be an adequate resource in teaching L2. Forcing students to exclusively communicate in the L2 can be stressful, especially in the low and intermediate levels (Tang, 2002; Schweers, 1999). Yonesaka (2005) indicates the exclusive use of L2 was only intended to maximise the input of students, exposing them to a level they could not understand. In this way, Yonesaka (2005) and Burden (2000) indicate the exclusivity of L2 can generate a student-teacher relationship based on a position of power. In this case, if students need the support of L1 and the teacher is unable or refuses to respond to it, it can lead to unsatisfactory experiences for all (Burden, 2000).

'Students at lower proficiency levels view L1 as a beneficial aid in their English language learning process, enhancing their confidence in articulating thoughts (Mouhanna, 2009; Al Sharaeai, 2012). Conversely, students with higher proficiency levels perceive the incorporation of L1 as reducing their exposure to the second language (L2). However, they exhibit greater acceptance of L1 usage for grammatical explanations'

The use of L1 has several functions within the classroom, such as giving instructions in beginner levels (Tang, 2002; Atkinson, 1987), explaining the meaning of words (Tang, 2002; Jingxia, 2010) or clarifying complex grammatical concepts (Tang, 2002; Harbord, 1992). This suggests L1 can be used in class by the teacher to facilitate learning and by students to produce language and check comprehension (Atkinson, 1987; Nation, 2003; Weschler, 1997; Auerbach, 1993; Norman, 2008; Malyuga, 2009). A noteworthy investigation is the study conducted by Hawa et al. (2021) in the context of higher education, which explores students' perspectives on the use of their first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Students at lower proficiency levels view L1 as a beneficial aid in their English language learning process, enhancing their confidence in articulating thoughts (Mouhanna, 2009; Al Sharaeai, 2012). Conversely, students with higher proficiency levels perceive the incorporation of L1 as reducing their exposure to the second language (L2). However, they exhibit greater acceptance of L1 usage for grammatical explanations (Al Sharaeai, 2012).

Cook (2001) argues L1 should be used systematically and with clear intent. Also, students can turn to L1 as a strategy for their collaborative and individual learning. So, the use of L1 can be considered as a pedagogical tool that facilitates the teaching and learning of L2 (Yusuf, 2009). Cook (2001) illustrates this idea claiming that *'given the appropriate environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs'* (Cook, 2001, p. 23). Finally, Deller and Rinvolutri (2002) state that *'many teachers have continued to use the mother tongue because it is both necessary and effective'* (Deller & Rinvolutri, 2002, p. 3). Alshehri (2017) considers that L1 can positively influence foreign language learning. Khati (2011) expresses that the *English only* policy can have a negative impact on students. This fact turns to be very important in relation to learning instructions and classroom interactions (Yusuf, 2009; Harmer, 2007). As Hawa et al. (2021) explain, *'learners feel difficult to understand the materials and tend to be passive to communicate in the target language during teaching and learning'* (Hawa et al., 2021, p. 1094). In terms of language methods, communicative approach disapproves L1 as opposed to the grammatical translation method (Esmail, 2015).

The arguments against the use of L1 refer to reducing the opportunities for input from L2 (Parker & Karağaça, 2014) and creating a dependence on it (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002; Levine,

2003; Nation, 2003; Scott & de la Fuente, 2008; Littlewood & Yu, 2009). Krashen (1982) claims that an excessive use of L1 not only deprives students of L2 input, but also does not motivate them to use it. According to Krashen (1987), there is no reason to rely on L1 in class. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) state L2 should be *'the medium as well as the object of instruction'* (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 8).

Larsen-Freeman (2000) prefers using L2 to manage and control the class and claims that *'the students learn from these classroom management exchanges, too, and realise that the target language is a vehicle for communication'* (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 132). Supporting the idea that teachers should create a communicative environment in L2 in the most natural way, Sharma (2006) is also against the use of L1 in the English classroom suggesting that *'the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn; as they hear and use English, they will internalise it to begin to think in English; the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it'* (Sharma, 2006, p. 80).

Prior training in second language (L2) teaching methodologies significantly influences the pedagogical approaches and rationales of prospective English language teachers. An analysis of Harmer's (1983, 1991, 2001, 2007) evolving perspective on the use of the first language (L1) in L2 acquisition across several decades reveals that, by 2007, the scholar acknowledged the critical role of L1 in learning L2. He recognised L1 as an integral part of students' identities, a sentiment echoed by subsequent research (Pillai et al., 2015; Aziz et al., 2020; Aziz et al., 2021). This suggests that the natural inclination to rely on L1 for understanding L2, whether through conscious or unconscious comparison and translation, is a legitimate and valuable part of the language learning process.

4. STUDY RESULTS

4.1. Statistical analysis

Out of the 140 respondents working in both formal and non-formal education who were surveyed, 75% are women. This aligns with statistics reporting that approximately 75% of language teachers in Spain are female (Zippia, 2024). The predominant age range of respondents is between 31 and 35 years, including adjacent age groups, accounting for 53% of the total. Furthermore, it is observed that there are three primary nationalities among the respondents: 37% are British, 27% are Spanish, and 20% are American, with an additional 11 nationalities represented to a lesser extent. The most common range of teaching experience among participants is 6 to 15 years, encompassing over 56% of respondents.

The subsequent sections will detail the most significant findings from the survey, beginning with the presentation of results for each question, followed by an analysis of these findings. A notable trend is that most respondents are employed by language schools (57%), in contrast to those working in public, private, or subsidised schools. Among these educators, 24% teach primary students, while 43% teach at the secondary level (Figure 1).

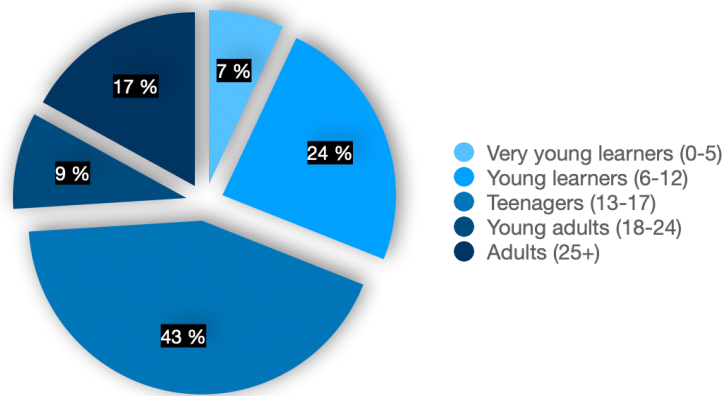


Figure 1. Student pool age group

Concerning the autonomy in determining the Spanish/English linguistic balance within their classrooms, 58% of educators report having the discretion to decide this mix. However, it is notable that over half are required to use only English during their instructional time. This contrast becomes more apparent when considering the views of their colleagues, as indicated by a

decrease in this percentage (Figure 2). Additionally, 73% of the respondents are involved in teaching English as a second language (L2), whereas 16% are tasked with instructing other subjects in English. A smaller segment, 11%, engages in both teaching English as L2 and delivering content in other subjects through English (Figure 3).

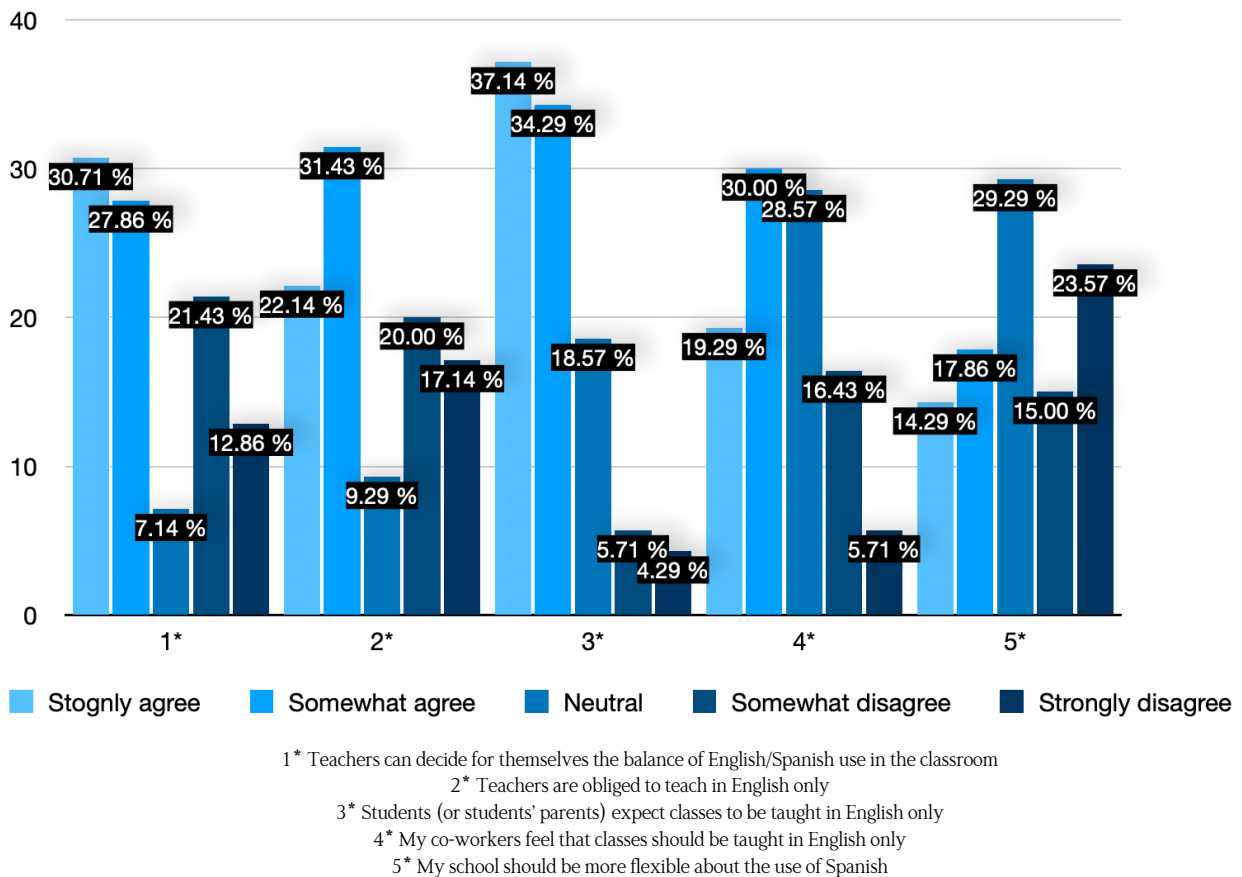


Figure 2. General attitude towards the use of Spanish in the workplace

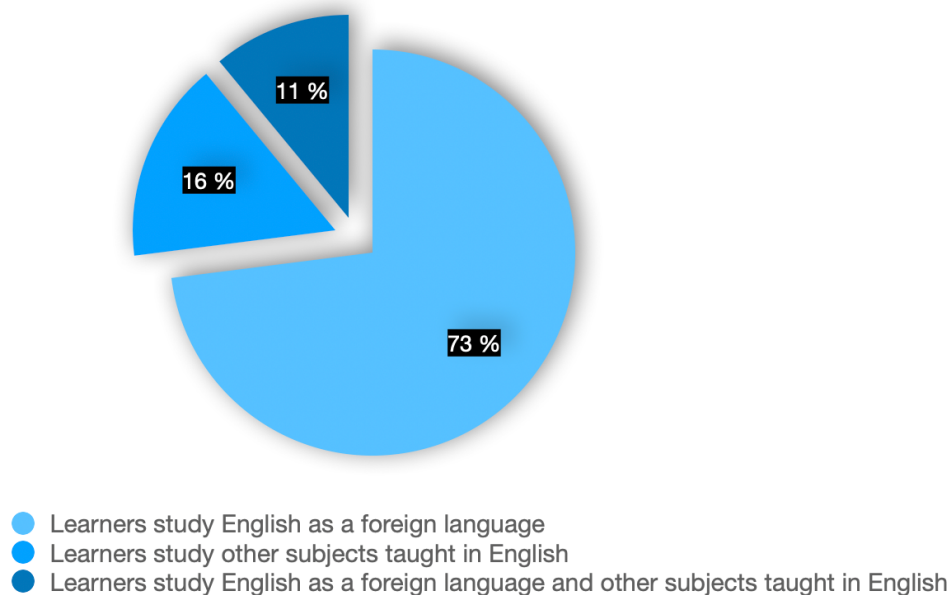
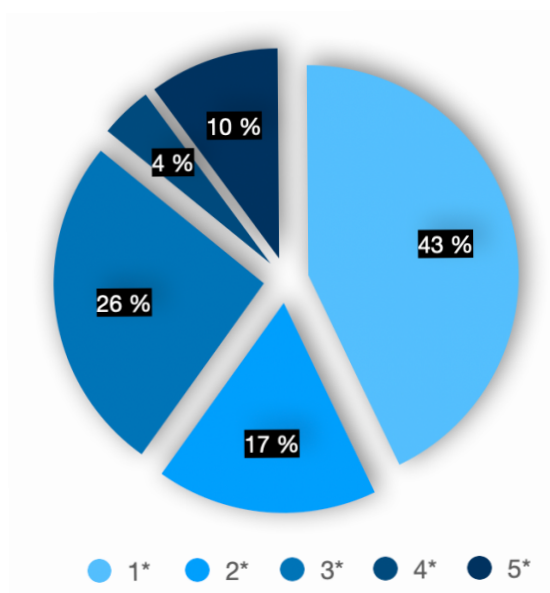


Figure 3. Responses on the place of English in the curriculum

The incorporation of Spanish into English lessons is administered via a range of approaches, as depicted in Figure 4. A notable 43% of educators employ Spanish selectively, considering its use beneficial without detracting from their students' motivation to communicate in English. This practice contrasts with the

26% of respondents who adhere strictly to using only English yet observe that their students persist in communicating in English, despite being aware of their instructors' proficiency in Spanish. This comparison brings to the fore the different strategies educators adopt in language instruction.



- 1* I primarily teach in English, resorting to Spanish only when deemed appropriate, while my students consistently strive to communicate in English
- 2* I mainly teach in English but use Spanish whenever necessary, which I believe reduces my students' efforts to communicate in English
- 3* I teach solely in English, and although my students know I understand Spanish, they consistently try to communicate in English
- 4* I teach only in English; my students know I understand Spanish, leading me to think they're less motivated to use English
- 5* I strictly teach in English, and my students, not knowing I understand Spanish, exclusively communicate in English

Figure 4. Educator strategies for Spanish use in English lessons and students' behaviour

The distribution of opinions on the flexibility of using Spanish in group work is nearly even, with a split of 47% to 53% (Figure 5). While this may initially appear negative, it is quite

positive, as it indicates that nearly half of the respondents support allowing students to use Spanish judiciously and appropriately while engaging with English exercises.

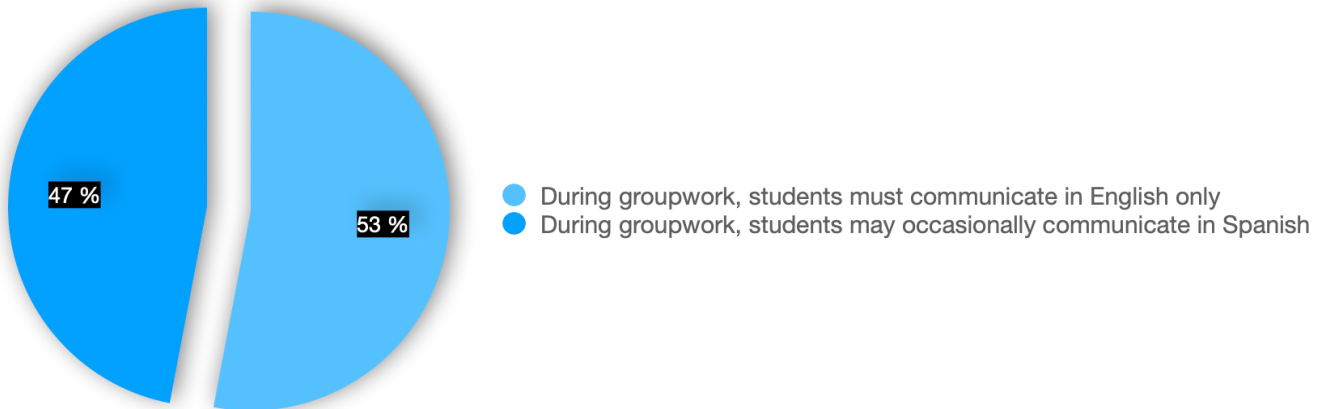


Figure 5. Educators' flexibility in the use of Spanish during groupwork

Concerning the use of Spanish, the number of teachers who would always use Spanish in the English language class is negligible. This was to be expected since it is a class taught in English and it would not make methodological sense to be continuously speaking Spanish. Also of note is the context in which the use of Spanish is largely accepted, which is teaching new vocabulary (57%) or new grammar (42%), explaining idioms

(55%), managing the class (46%), comparing English and Spanish (61%), and addressing students' personal problems (68%) (Figure 6). This speaks to the fact that communication with students is essential, and we cannot, nor should we or do we want, to impose linguistic barriers that prevent this, especially considering that these are personal problems, outside of the strict academic field.

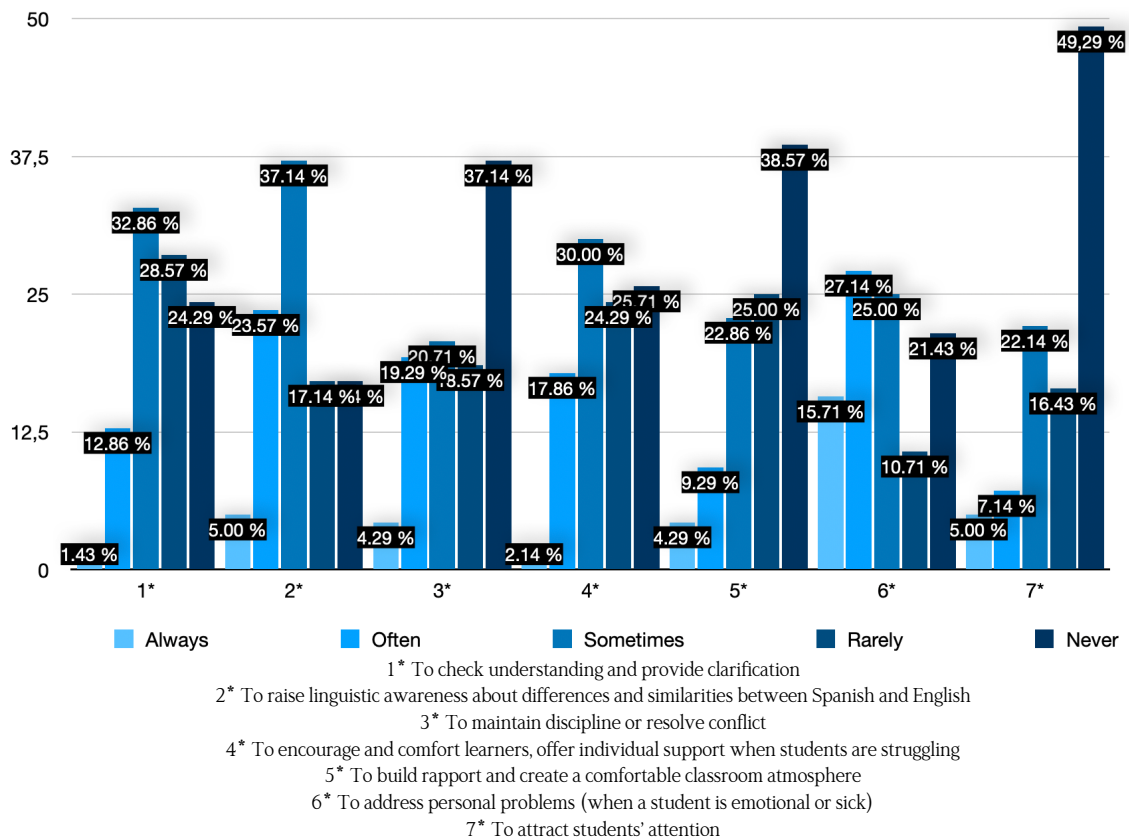


Figure 6. Acceptable contexts for Spanish use

The subsequent examination concerns the potential use of Spanish as a resource under various circumstances (Figure 7). It is observed that 50% of respondents lean towards the belief that classes taught exclusively in English are most beneficial for students. This viewpoint is reinforced by nearly 70% who suggest that flexibility in language use may lead to students becoming

complacent and opting to communicate in Spanish. Conversely, almost 60% of the participants argue that emphasis should be placed more on fluency rather than accuracy, even if it necessitates occasional use of Spanish. Furthermore, 65% concur that incorporating Spanish can alleviate student stress and foster a more relaxed learning atmosphere.

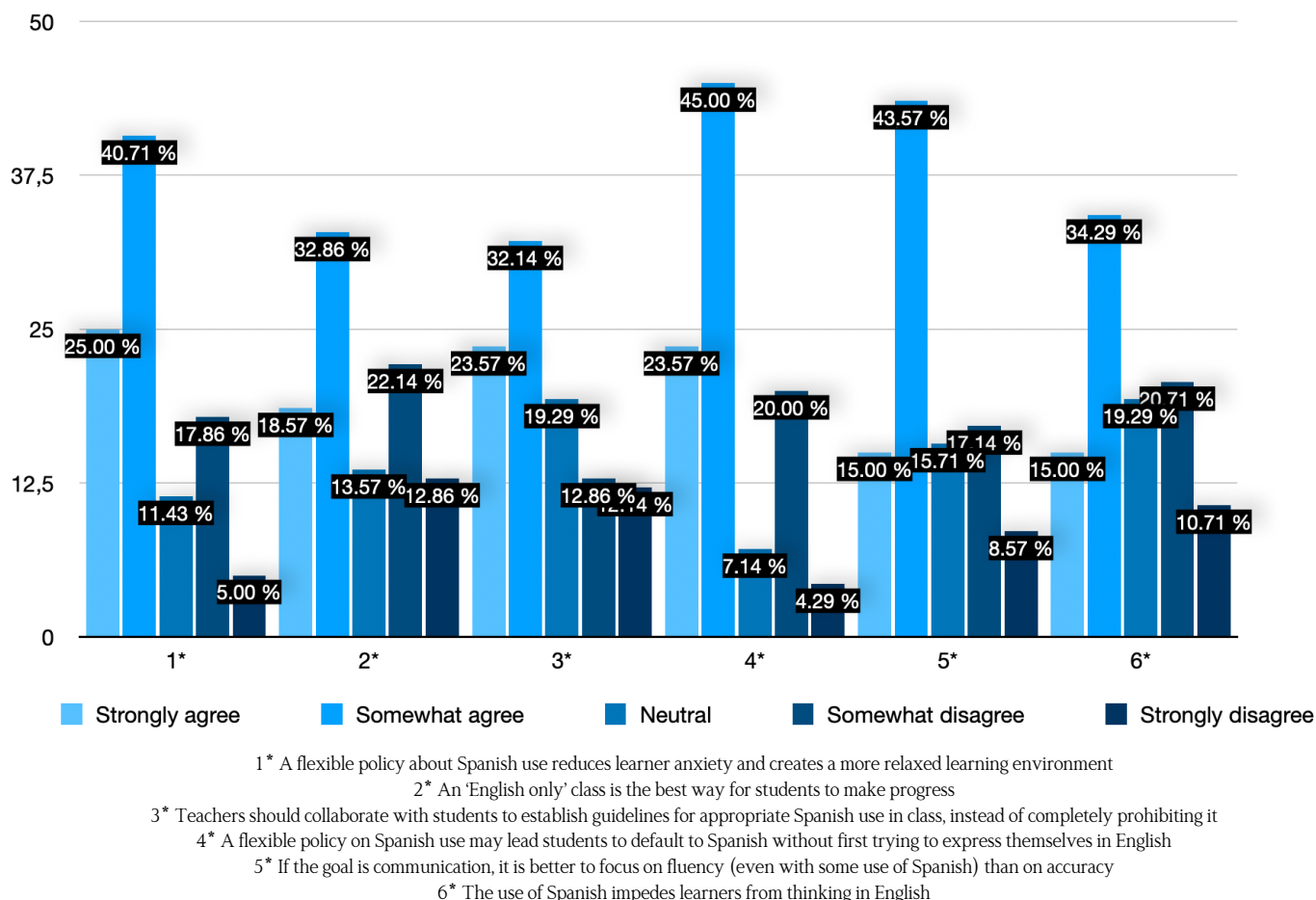


Figure 7. Educators' perceptions concerning English vs Spanish language policies in the classroom

Over 50% of teachers advocate for the use of Spanish when students struggle to express themselves or comprehend English explanations after multiple attempts (Figure 8). They emphasize the importance of facilitating students' understanding by contrasting concepts with their native language (L1). However, opinions vary regarding whether Spanish should be employed to assess comprehension or serve as a foundation for learning English, lacking a clear consensus among educators. At the same time, over 62% of respondents agree that it's appropriate for students to reconfirm information in Spanish and make language comparisons (Figure 9). Moreover, respondents believe that being bilingual can serve as a motivational model for students, encouraging them to excel in learning and participation.

Finally, respondents note that the use of Spanish limits exposure to English (55%), while exclusively using English fosters self-confidence (60%) (Figure 10). They agree (60%) that L2 acquisition differs from the process of acquiring a L1. Discrepancies arise among teachers regarding the use of Spanish. This acknowledgment aims to respect students as individuals and foster a positive environment, although there's an inclination towards a positive perspective. Similarly, when considering whether English should be the sole medium of instruction, opinions are evenly split, although there's a slight lean against those opposed to this idea. Respondents find the use of students' native language quite or very appropriate, especially at lower proficiency levels (Figure 11). Additionally, even at beginner levels, the use of Spanish becomes more acceptable as proficiency decreases.

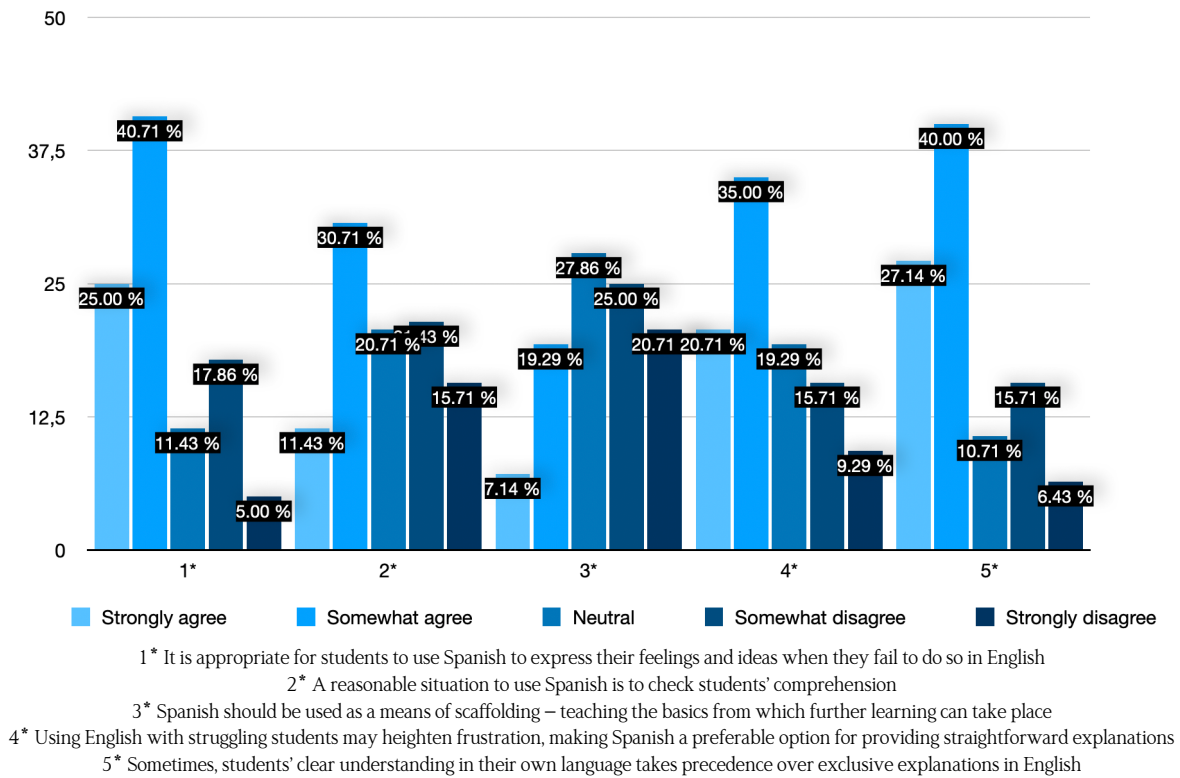


Figure 8. Educators' perceptions concerning English vs Spanish language policies in the classroom (continued)

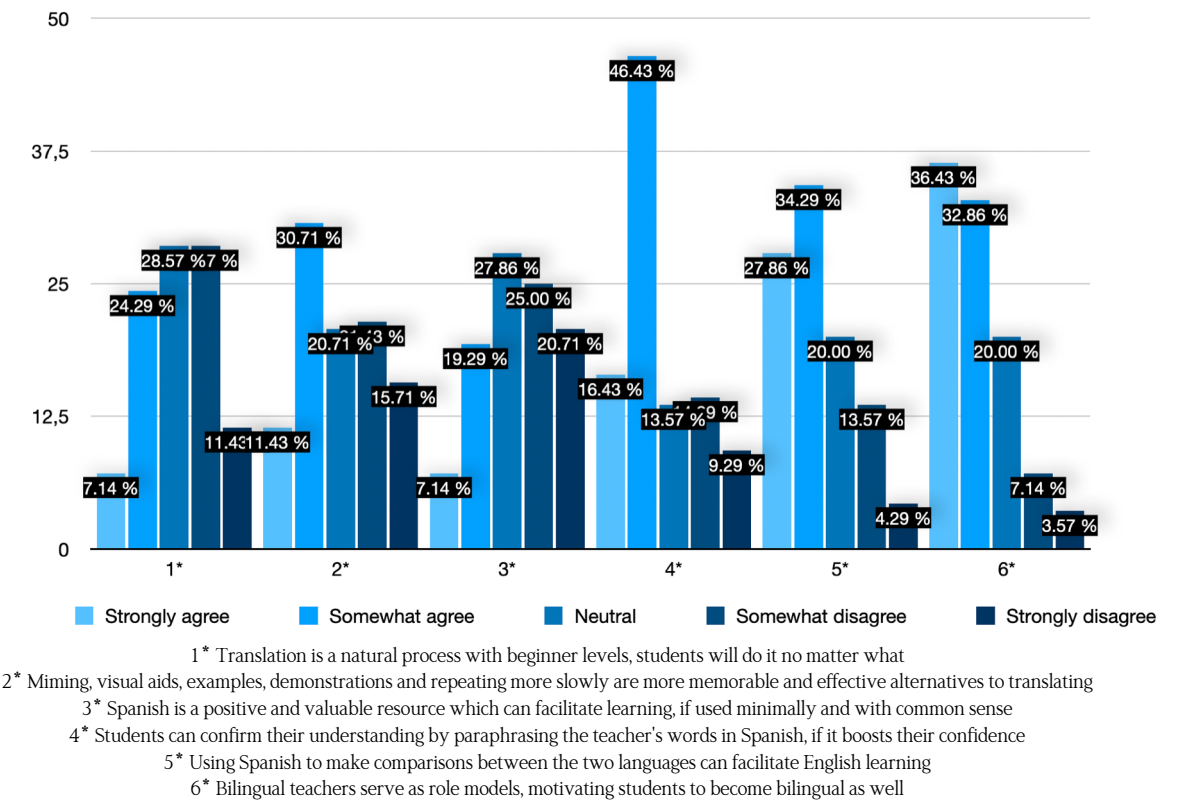
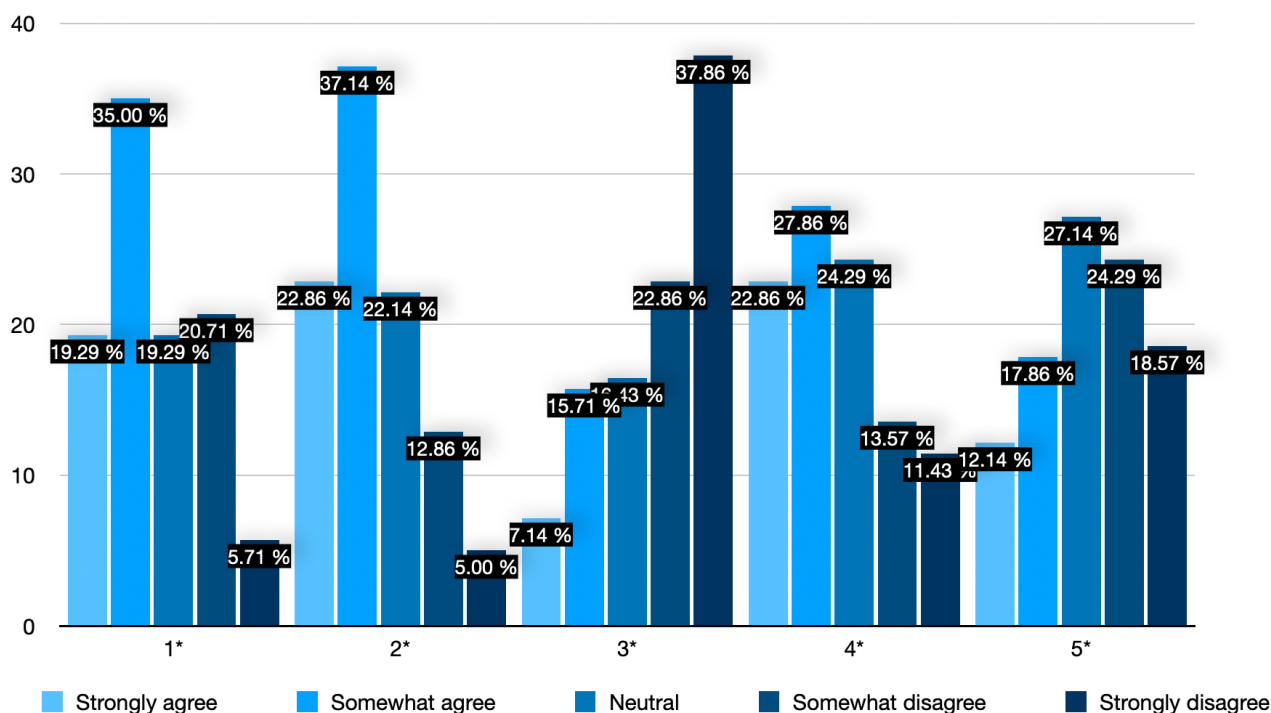


Figure 9. Educators' perceptions concerning English vs Spanish language policies in the classroom (continued)



- 1* Using Spanish limits exposure to comprehensible input, hindering listening and understanding of English, thus slowing progress
- 2* Exclusively using English fosters confidence by encouraging learners to communicate despite limited proficiency
- 3* Learners acquire their L2 the same way they acquire their L1
- 4* Teachers should use Spanish judiciously to acknowledge students' individuality, convey care, and create a positive learning environment
- 5* English needs to be the only medium as well as the object of instruction

Figure 10. Educators' perceptions concerning English vs Spanish language policies in the classroom (continued)

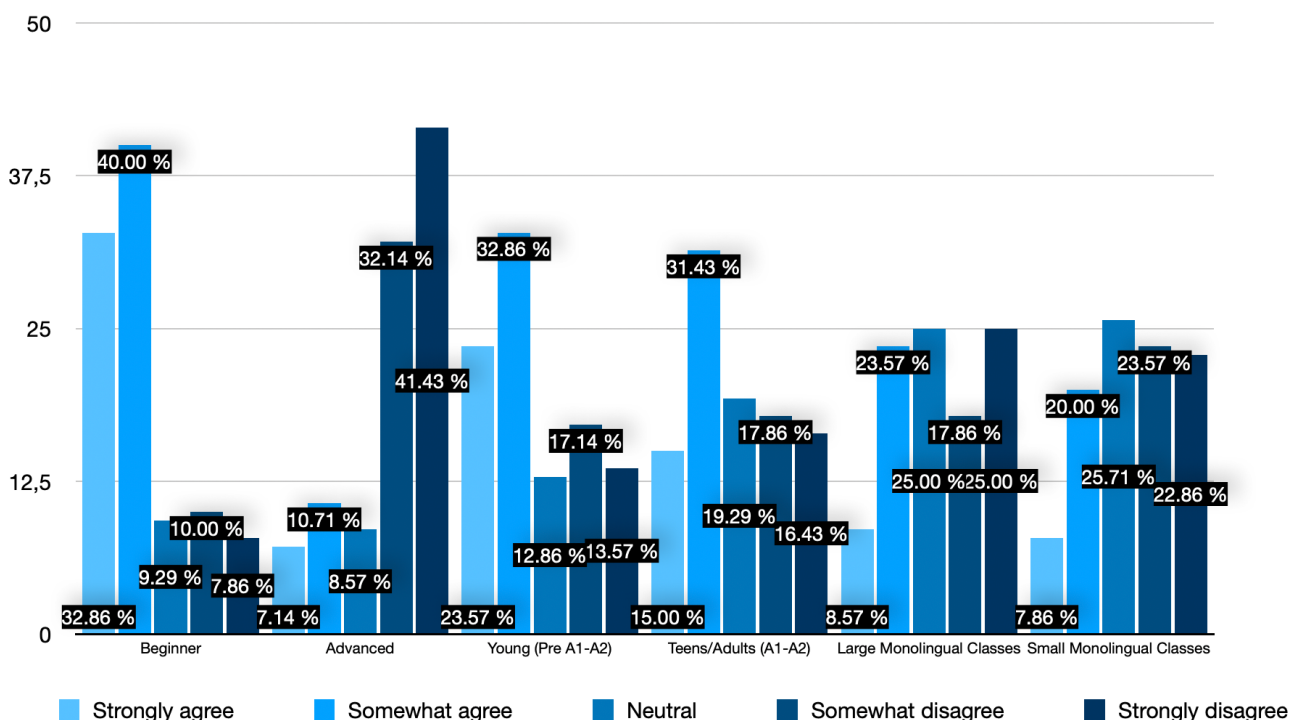


Figure 11. Acceptability of Spanish usage across student levels/ages

4.2. Questionnaire analysis

Following the statistical analysis and data presentation, this section will interpret the results and include comparisons based on factors like country of origin, workplace, educational level, and Spanish proficiency, highlighting key findings organised by sections.

The *School Policy on the Use of Spanish in the English Classroom* section aims to provide an overview of various factors, including workplace settings, student demographics, class sizes, and school policies regarding Spanish use in English classes. A notable finding is that 58% of teachers surveyed feel they have autonomy in deciding the Spanish-English balance in their instruction. Conversely, 37% reported no compulsion to teach exclusively in English, a perspective that challenges the prevalent belief in Spain that credibility is lost if teachers, especially non-native speakers, do not use English exclusively. Additionally, over 20% of respondents indicated that their peers believe lessons should not be conducted solely in English, marking a significant portion considering the study's focus on the utility of using the L1 in L2 classrooms.

Further analysis based on the type of institution (language schools vs schools) shows minimal overall differences. In language schools, 12% of teachers felt compelled to use only English, compared to 39% in schools who felt a forced exclusion of Spanish and 20% who felt somewhat obliged.

Additional comments underscored that the use of Spanish varies with the students' level of proficiency and time of the year, the impracticality of such support in multilingual classrooms, and the role of Spanish as a foundational support for progression.

The *Attitudes and Opinions about the Use of Spanish in the English Classroom* section explores teaching methods involving the L1 as support in primarily English classes. Surprisingly, nearly 60% of respondents report predominantly using English, indicating that a significant proportion of English teachers (or teachers of subjects in English) leverage L1 support. A closer look at language schools vs traditional schools reveals notable differences. Teachers in schools report a higher tendency to teach exclusively in English compared to language schools, where 65% of teachers incorporate some Spanish, versus 53% in traditional schools. This contradicts the common assumption that language schools would be more likely to conduct lessons solely in English, whereas traditional schools might be more lenient and utilise Spanish as a supportive resource. The 12% discrepancy could be attributed to institutional policies that implicitly or explicitly discourage Spanish use in the classroom. Additionally, 28% of teachers exclusively use English, and despite students being aware of their teachers' bilingual abilities, they continue to endeavour to communicate in English. There's a concern among 13% of teachers that if students knew they could speak both languages, it might lead to decreased effort and increased reliance on Spanish. However, the teacher's preference for using English does not translate to students' group work, where language schools exhibit stricter policies against Spanish use compared to traditional schools. Comparisons between native Spanish-speaking teachers and non-native speakers show minimal differences from the overall findings. Another area of focus is determining the optimal moments for Spanish reliance, with a distinct variation based on teachers' origins. The three areas showing the most significant differences are outlined below (Table 1).

Table 1
Frequency of Spanish use

	SPANIARDS	FOREIGNERS
Frequently use Spanish to teach new vocabulary	50%	60%
Frequently use Spanish to teach grammar	52%	42%
Always use of Spanish to address students' personal problems	40%	43%

The initial findings reveal that foreign teachers tend to use Spanish primarily for teaching vocabulary, while Spanish teachers are more inclined to use it for explaining grammar. This is attributed to the fact that 90% of foreign teachers, including those from Britain, America, Ireland, and Canada, have English as their first language and thus have a more intrinsic understanding of English grammar.

The section on *The Use of Spanish as a Resource in the English Classroom* exposes an acknowledgment among teachers that language proficiency alone does not encompass the entirety of teaching. Approximately 60% of teachers, regardless of their background, turn to Spanish to aid students in expressing themselves during personal situations where English may be insuffi-

cient. However, the choice to use Spanish is influenced not only by the teachers' origins but also by the institutional context. For instance, 9.43% of schoolteachers consistently use Spanish to engage students' attention, and 13.21% do so frequently, compared to 2.50% and 3.75%, respectively, among language schoolteachers. This suggests that Spanish is more commonly utilised in schools, possibly due to larger class sizes making student management more challenging. Language schools, typically with smaller class sizes ranging from 1 to 10 students, show a more sparing use of Spanish for this purpose.

In schools, where class sizes often range from 20 to 30 students, the use of Spanish as an engagement tool is notably more prevalent. This difference may stem from the distinct dynamics

between teachers and students in schools, where there is more shared time and potentially a closer relationship, in contrast to the more dynamic and engaging activities found in language schools. In schools, the presence of monotonous activities necessitates additional motivation, for which Spanish is employed.

Regarding the strategic use of Spanish in monolingual English classes, respondents advocate for a judicious, sensible application of Spanish to reduce student anxiety, enhance communication goals, and improve concept comprehension. They view the teacher's role as pivotal in modelling an approach to bilingualism, suggesting that drawing comparisons between the two languages can facilitate learning through associative memory.

The debate over the efficacy of English-only classes versus the strategic use of Spanish, including negotiations with students on when Spanish can be used and the role of translation, presents a complex range of opinions. Concerns arise particularly around the tendency for lower-level students to resort to automatic or unintentional translation, and whether alternative forms of assistance might be more effective than translation itself.

Approximately 70% of respondents believe that a flexible approach to Spanish usage could lead to students habitually relying on Spanish for questions and exercises, bypassing attempts to address them in English first. This perspective suggests that such flexibility might limit English exposure and, consequently, reduce opportunities for language input. Advocates for English exclusivity argue that it fosters greater confidence in students' communication skills in English. However, it's recognised that as educators working with humans, there are exceptional circumstances where using L1 is justified, especially when students need to express emotions or when identifying students' needs.

A comparative analysis between language schools and traditional schools, as well as between native English-speaking teachers and Spanish teachers of English, reveals notable differences. 58% of Spanish teachers favour exclusive English instruction as the optimal path for student advancement, compared to 48% of native English-speaking teachers. This suggests a more stringent approach among Spanish educators. Furthermore, 80% of native English teachers are open to using Spanish for translation at beginner levels, whereas only 65% of their Spanish counterparts agree. Additionally, the acceptance of Spanish use, even for crucial concepts, is lower among Spanish teachers (57%) compared to their foreign counterparts (70%). This stricter stance by non-native Spanish-speaking teachers of English may stem from their own language learning experiences or the belief that immersive learning without L1 is most effective, potentially influenced by opportunities to learn or improve English through living or studying abroad.

Evidence supporting the belief in learning English through immersion, akin to L1 acquisition, shows a divide between Spanish English-language teachers and native English teachers. 18% of Spanish teachers strongly advocate for the L1 acquisition approach, a figure that rises to 39% when including those who find it advisable. In contrast, only 3% of native English teachers

strongly support this view, with an additional 13% considering it convenient. Furthermore, 45% of Spanish teachers view English as both the subject and the medium of instruction, compared to 25% among native English teachers. Interestingly, 70% of Spanish teachers are open to using Spanish to enhance communicative fluency, a sentiment shared by 53% of their native English counterparts.

Institutional perspectives reveal that 65% of schoolteachers worry about students becoming overly reliant on Spanish, affecting their English proficiency. This concern is slightly less among language schoolteachers, at 55%, possibly due to the focused nature and reduced hours of extracurricular English activities.

Analysis also covers the pros and cons of using the L1 in classrooms and the impact of teacher training. It highlights that Spanish support is generally accepted for beginners, with negligible differences across age groups, suggesting its suitability for both children and adults. Interestingly, 46% of respondents reported their training explicitly discouraged L1 use, illuminating the ongoing debate this research engages with.

In concluding remarks, the discussion turns to the perception of Spanish use based on teachers' proficiency levels. Excluding native Spanish speakers, a higher proficiency in Spanish correlates with greater acceptance of L1 as a classroom resource. For example, 82% of teachers with a C1 Spanish level regard it as beneficial. The lower approval rate among native Spanish speakers, at 71%, may reflect workplace pressures, the need to validate their competence, or the influence of their training background (Figure 12).

5.2. Interview analysis

The study involved 11 teacher volunteers from three countries, aged 23 to 53, with 3 to 18 years of teaching experience in Spain. A comprehensive analysis was conducted on the data collected through personal and group interviews, as well as detailed written narratives. This analysis aims to offer observations on the practicality of using L1 in teaching L2 in classrooms.

There's a prevalent reticence toward using Spanish in English classrooms, a sentiment echoed by most study participants in their respective institutions, with one exception from a respondent who is also a language school director. At a language school employing two of the participants, Spanish is permitted in specific situations, and the institution tends to recruit teachers with a minimum of a C1 level in Spanish. The respondents noted the positive reception from parents who value easy communication with teachers and from students who benefit from immediate clarification of doubts, which helps maintain their motivation.

In a private bilingual school where four of the study participants teach, the policy is to foster complete English immersion. Here, English teachers are to feign ignorance of Spanish, and Spanish teachers are to act as if they are non-Spanish speakers. One Spanish teacher at this school highlighted a disregard for the potential advantages of using Spanish in the classroom.

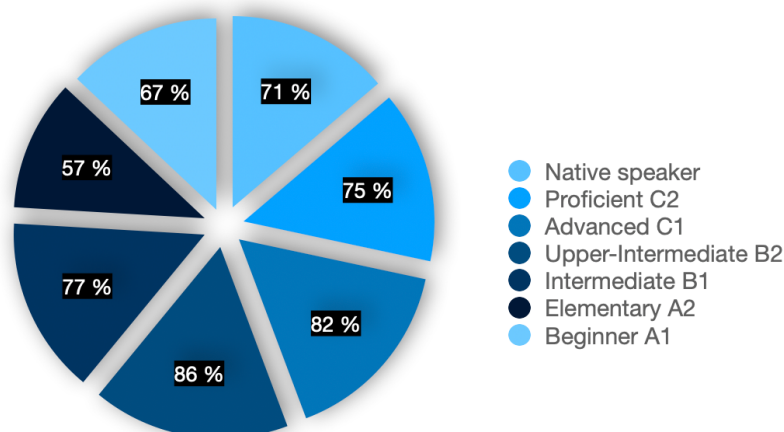


Figure 12. Perceptions of Spanish utility as a teaching resource by teacher language proficiency level

The prior training of teachers also influences their attitudes and teaching approaches. One teacher recounted experiencing lessons delivered solely in Arabic, which was meant to demonstrate the possibility of learning a language without resorting to one's mother tongue, though she questioned the effectiveness of this method. Another participant was trained to cultivate an English-only environment, pointing out the diversity in educational philosophies.

Despite not receiving formal training in English language teaching, two respondents drew upon their experiences as language learners and their time in English-speaking countries. One recalled a transition from passive to active English proficiency during their stay in New York, where real-life application solidified their language skills. Only one out of the eleven teachers recalled specific training regarding the use of L1 in L2 instruction.

Several participants acknowledged the value of occasionally using Spanish to clarify grammatical points, introduce new vocabulary, and explain task procedures. While they aim to conduct lessons and address questions in English, they view Spanish as a supplementary tool to ensure comprehension, describing it as a 'back-up' for understanding. One teacher mentioned using Spanish only as a final option, even adopting a foreign accent when speaking Spanish to maintain the persona of a native English speaker, sometimes enlisting students' help for Spanish explanations. Spanish is not only seen as beneficial for explaining grammar but also for drawing comparisons between L1 and L2, highlighting nuances and connotations in both languages. Moreover, most teachers recognise that L1 usage can strengthen student-teacher connections and support students emotionally, showing empathy, listening, and providing advice when needed. In certain teaching scenarios, teachers speak in L2 while permitting students to respond in L1.

Teachers primarily employ Spanish for disciplinary purposes when faced with serious issues, prioritising behaviour management over English instruction. Additionally, they utilise Spanish to maintain classroom control and to emphasise the value of maximising English class time.

The consensus among educators is that adult learners, especially beginners, are well-positioned to benefit from L1 usage in the classroom. Adults have a pressing desire for rapid, practical language acquisition that can be immediately applicable in real-world contexts, such as business meetings. Using L1 can streamline lessons and minimise the likelihood of students becoming disengaged.

The educators generally advocate a strategic and limited use of Spanish at the foundational levels of English language learning to keep students motivated. As proficiency in English grows, the reliance on Spanish diminishes. However, it remains an asset for clarifying complex vocabulary and grammar, fostering linguistic connections, and addressing personal student needs. There is a consensus that without the imperative to use English, less proficient students might lose motivation. Setting clear guidelines for Spanish use is deemed essential.

The teachers express a need for adept classroom management skills to use L1 effectively and judiciously. They point out the necessity of equipping students with ample opportunities to practice English, particularly once they gain confidence in the activities. One teacher analogises the use of L1 to a craftsman's tool: its effectiveness is determined by the skill level of the user – a novice may misuse it, but in the hands of an expert, it can produce exemplary work. Thus, Spanish in the English classroom is another instrument at the disposal of a well-trained educator.

One teacher's stance on using Spanish is shaped by various factors: her school's policy, the pre-adolescent age and advanced English level of her students, her personal insecurities about her Spanish accent, and her immersive experience in the Spanish culture that advanced her second language proficiency.

Among the surveyed educators, two exhibit apparent contradictions in their approach to L1 use. One acknowledges that using L1 can simplify concept comprehension and expedite the learning process by allowing occasional translation, yet he minimises its use to maintain competence and authority, especially with children or adolescents. He believes immersion in English

and the effort to speak it mirrors the authentic experience of being abroad, thus serving as the most effective learning method. The other expresses a general opposition to using Spanish but concedes its utility in challenging situations or with unfamiliar words, and even among students during peer interactions.

A common concern is the overreliance on Spanish in the classroom, which could diminish students' efforts to engage in English, particularly among adolescents or those at lower proficiency levels. To prevent this dependency, some teachers deliberately conceal their ability to speak or understand Spanish. Two respondents go as far as to feign limited Spanish proficiency or use a foreign accent when Spanish is necessary. In contrast, one teacher openly shares his non-native English speaker status and proficiency in the students' mother tongue, believing that his linguistic journey can serve as an inspirational example.

The fear that using Spanish might impede thinking in English and limit communication skills in the language is prevalent among the teachers. They encourage attempts in English first and resort to Spanish only when necessary to prevent student frustration. To manage Spanish use, they advocate for clear guidelines regarding when and how Spanish is used, combined with age-appropriate positive reinforcement or disciplinary measures. The consensus is that with well-defined rules and purposes for L1 use, it need not be a barrier to learning.

The application of Spanish in educational settings varies, influenced by institutional policies, student proficiency levels, and ages. Teachers in traditional schools often have precise practices tailored to the specific courses they teach, while those in language schools, instructing a range of levels, adjust their L1 use to suit the needs of their students – expecting different language use from B1 level students compared to those at C1.

One educator promotes constant English communication in class, noting that children are generally eager to learn and respond well to the school atmosphere. To discourage the misuse of Spanish, this teacher implements light sanctions, such as additional exercises or temporary exclusion from games, which supports peer accountability for English use. However, the predominant approach among teachers is positive reinforcement; for instance, students earn 'bucks' for exemplary behaviour or using English, which can be exchanged for small rewards.

Another teacher employs a tiered incentive system, recognising that younger students might naturally converse in Spanish among themselves and does not penalise them for it. With older students, the expectations are higher, and casual conversation in Spanish can lead to the loss of points. Yet, if Spanish is used for task-related questions or to facilitate learning, it is deemed acceptable without repercussions.

One respondent pointed out that the foremost rule in their classroom is to speak English, with deductions in points or parental notifications as penalties for defaulting to Spanish. Nonetheless, there is flexibility for Spanish use in pair exercises or group work, provided it doesn't disrupt the class. Another concurs with allowing Spanish among students during collaborative tasks.

Different tactics are employed to balance English immersion with practical L1 use. One teacher introduced Spanish flags for students to signal their desire to speak Spanish, setting clear boundaries for its use. The goal is to conduct most of the class in English, resorting to Spanish only when it's necessary and advantageous. Despite this flexibility, there's a consistent emphasis on encouraging students to practice speaking English with their peers to enhance their speaking skills.

One educator insists on English as the primary language of communication in class, resorting to Spanish only for clarifying assignments or confirming word meanings. The use of Spanish is adapted for different age groups: it's limited to welfare checks for 3-year-olds and expanded to concept explanations for 10 to 15-year-olds.

There is a consensus among teachers that understanding the students' native language and culture facilitates deeper connections, acknowledging the significance of these elements in students' identities and demonstrating respect for linguistic equality. A respondent noted that understanding students' native language aids in developing targeted teaching strategies that cater to their specific learning needs. They also mentioned that language is intertwined with culture and traditions, so integrating their cultural perspectives into English language learning enriches the process.

Proficiency in the students' mother tongue is advantageous for various reasons, including the prediction of grammatical and phonetic errors, comprehension of certain behaviours, and communication with parents.

The overarching conclusion is that using L1 as a resource in the L2 classroom is generally positive for both students and teachers when employed judiciously and at strategic moments. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that as student proficiency increases, the necessity for L1 support diminishes, sometimes by student preference. However, reliance on L1 should be carefully managed to prevent dependence and ensure adequate exposure to L2.

6. DISCUSSION

Concerning the inquiry and hypothesis 1 regarding when and in what activities teachers use the students' native language (L1) in the English (L2) classroom, it's generally anticipated that teachers will employ L1 to dispel uncertainties, convey instructions, and manage classroom dynamics. A significant use of Spanish is reported when addressing students' personal issues. In such instances, the priority shifts from language instruction to providing care and understanding for the student. According to the survey, Spanish is predominantly used for maintaining discipline, resolving conflicts, language comparisons, and introducing new vocabulary and grammar.

Both oral and written narratives from participants reveal consistent use of Spanish for classroom management, disciplining, and grammatical explanations, particularly with younger students or adults at beginner levels. In addition to these uses, the interviews underscore the employment of L1 to

build and sustain positive teacher-student relationships and alleviate student anxiety. Notably, although not a key feature in the quantitative data, 5 out of 11 interviewees pointed out the time-saving aspect of using L1, especially with lower-level adult learners. Thus, the first hypothesis is affirmatively supported.

Regarding question and hypothesis 2 about teachers' overall stance on using Spanish (L1) in the English (L2) classroom, the expectation is that despite some teachers' reluctance and the perception of L1 use as negative, the majority acknowledge its practicality and advantages. While teachers generally try to minimise Spanish use due to personal beliefs or institutional mandates, a significant number resort to it when deemed necessary or beneficial – for instance, when a student fails to grasp a linguistic concept or task instructions. The preference indicates that concept mastery is sometimes prioritised over English language instruction.

Interview responses predominantly view Spanish use favourably, citing benefits such as enhanced teacher-student rapport. However, there is unanimity that English should remain the principal mode of communication, confirming the second hypothesis. The findings suggest that Spanish can be an effective resource when its application is judicious and moderated.

Addressing the third question and hypothesis, which concerns the regulations of Spanish schools on the use of L1 in L2 classrooms, the hypothesis posits that Spanish schools, particularly private institutions, adopt a strict stance on L1 usage in L2 education. The study indicates that while teachers initially had the autonomy to determine the English-Spanish ratio in their classrooms, over half report that their institutions mandate an English-only teaching approach. Interviews reveal that some teachers are encouraged to anglicise their names or alter their accents to cultivate an English-dominant environment, a practice more prevalent in private schools. Moreover, some language schoolteachers reported job losses due to unauthorised Spanish use. These findings affirm the third hypothesis: despite recognising the benefits of judicious Spanish use in English language learning, institutional policies often strictly limit it.

Regarding the fourth question and hypothesis, which explores the factors influencing teachers' perspectives on L1 use in L2 classrooms, it was presumed that prior training, institutional policies, students' L1 communication abilities, and teaching experience significantly shape teachers' views. The responses partially validate this hypothesis. Teachers' views are primarily shaped by their experiences and ability to communicate with students, rather than institutional influence, which dictates their actions rather than beliefs. Contrary to expectations, previous training does not emerge as a strong influence, as many educators report that their training either discouraged L1 use or did not address it. Nonetheless, those with recent training recall discussions about using L1 effectively and sensibly as a support tool in predominantly English-based lessons.

The study's quantitative data underscores the impact of fluency and communication skills. Charts reveal the significance teachers place on fluency and their tendency to use Spanish for

addressing students' personal issues or when students struggle to express thoughts and emotions in English. Teachers' capacities and experiences guide their strategic use of Spanish, suggesting that over time, educators adapt their methodologies to the unique needs of their students, sometimes moving beyond rigid policies to better serve their learners' requirements.

While discussing the outcomes and observations from this study, it's important to acknowledge its constraints. The scope of this research is not broad enough to warrant generalising the results, as the sampling was confined primarily to Spain, with a particular focus on Seville. The demographics of the questionnaire participants were predominantly female, employed in academies, and there was a lack of substantial representation from Spanish nationals. The narrative sample further reflected this imbalance, comprising 10 women and only 1 man, among which just 3 were Spanish natives, with the rest being English natives. The workplace distribution was also narrow, with 6 individuals from language schools and 5 from private schools. Incorporating more male perspectives and insights from public and subsidised school staff would have enriched the study.

Considering the possibility of a more targeted research approach, future studies might benefit from homing in on a single type of educational institution or focusing on a specific student age group, like primary or secondary school students.

A longitudinal study tracking the development of less experienced teachers over observations on the evolution of teaching practices. Similarly, observing native English teachers with limited Spanish proficiency and their changing use of L1 as a classroom resource could reveal significant trends.

Given the research's limited geographical and demographic range, the findings might not accurately reflect the experiences across various regions and teaching environments in Spain.

The interviewees had completed an online questionnaire prior to their interviews, which might have influenced their reported teaching practices and views. Hence, their interview responses might reflect their contemplated rather than their actual teaching methods. The interview format did, however, allow for the clarification and expansion of responses as needed. The research phase was completed in a tight timeframe of 2 weeks, with some narrative contributions arriving post deadline.

In conclusion, this study faces limitations such as the non-generalisability of results, time constraints, and the potential benefits of a longitudinal framework with a more diverse or balanced sample. Nonetheless, its aim was to illuminate the role of the mother tongue in the classroom. The findings, despite the limitations, can enhance our comprehension of teaching and learning dynamics and offer EFL teachers' valuable perceptions concerning the effective and sensible integration of L1 use.

7. CONCLUSION

This research has investigated the role of Spanish (L1) in enhancing English (L2) communication skills. The study calls for the strategic use of Spanish at beginner levels to mitigate student frustration and dropout by facilitating comprehension.

While less critical at advanced levels, Spanish can be selectively employed upon student request, underlining a preference for bilingual teachers. This aligns with the broader understanding that acknowledging students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds facilitates respect and inclusivity.

Key moments identified for L1 utilisation include grammar explanations, vocabulary introductions, and conveying essential messages, bringing to the fore its role in effective teaching and classroom management. Despite institutional policies often advocating for English-only environments, especially within private and language schools, the judicious use of Spanish is recognised for its educational value.

However, the study also exposes the delicate balance required in L1 usage to avoid fostering dependency, advocating for a thoughtful integration that prioritises extensive exposure to English. The findings suggest the need for educational institutions to adopt a more lenient stance towards L1 use, emphasising its potential as a pedagogical tool when used judiciously.

Training programmes and educational courses should emphasise the strategic use of L1, offering guidance on its balanced application and cautioning against overreliance. This research

argues for a shift in pre-teacher training to include practical examples of L1 use and feedback mechanisms, focusing on prioritising comprehension over language immersion for complex topics; leveraging L1 for linguistic comparisons to enhance learning; employing L1 for clarification when necessary to ensure understanding; utilising L1 to alleviate learning anxiety and foster motivation; strengthening student-teacher relationships through L1 for disciplinary and integrative purposes.

The focus of many Spanish educational institutions on promoting English immersion with native speakers overlooks the benefits of bilingual educators. This study calls for a re-evaluation of the effectiveness of Spanish teachers of English, urging native English educators to embrace their students' languages and cultures. A broader institutional openness and flexibility towards L1 use, supported by educational reforms and teacher training, could enrich the learning environment and more effectively meet learners' needs.

This research thus not only argues for the thoughtful incorporation of L1 into L2 classrooms but also calls for a paradigm shift in educational policy and teacher training to recognise and harness the full pedagogical potential of bilingual education.

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