

L1 in the EFL Classroom: A Comparative Study of Moroccan High School Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

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How to cite:

Krimi, M. (2025). L1 in the EFL Classroom: A Comparative Study of Moroccan High School Teachers' and Students' Perceptions. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies* 6(4).150-165.

<https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v6i4.650>

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received:
08/10/2025

Accepted:
12/11/2025

Keywords:

L1, Moroccan Arabic, EFL classroom, teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions, translanguaging..

Abstract

The use of students' first language (L1) in second language (L2) classrooms has long been a topic of scholarly debate, oscillating between traditional monolingual principles and recent bilingual or translanguaging approaches. This study examines the perceptions of Moroccan high school teachers and students regarding the use of Moroccan Arabic (Darija) in English classes, and explores the extent to which their views align. The research was conducted in five public high schools and involved 79 students and 15 teachers of English. Data were collected through online questionnaires containing closed and open-ended items and were analyzed descriptively. The findings revealed that both groups hold generally positive attitudes toward the use of Moroccan Arabic in EFL instruction. Students favored frequent L1 use, especially for vocabulary comprehension, grammar clarification, and affective support. Teachers also acknowledged its pedagogical value but preferred limited and strategic use, mainly for classroom management, giving instructions, and explaining difficult concepts. The findings also highlighted the need for balanced bilingual practices that maximize learning while maintaining sufficient exposure to English.

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of whether students' first language (L1) should be used or avoided in second language (L2) instruction has long been one of the most persistent and debated issues in language education. Historically, L1 played a central role in language teaching, particularly under the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which relied on written texts, grammatical analysis, and translation as primary means of instruction (Ghobadi & Ghasemi, 2015). However, GTM was later criticized for its limited capacity to foster students' communicative competence in the target language. This limitation paved the way for the emergence of different approaches that emphasized oral proficiency and interaction, such as the Direct Method, the Audiolingual Method, the Natural Approach, and later, Communicative and Task-Based Language Teaching. These developments reinforced the ideology of the "English-only" classroom, where L1 was often perceived as an impediment to effective L2 learning rather than a legitimate pedagogical resource (Cummins, 2007; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009).

Over the past few decades, this monolingual orthodoxy has been increasingly challenged. Scholars argue that the exclusion of L1 is often driven less by empirical evidence than by sociopolitical and commercial forces that historically privileged native-speaker norms and English-dominant teaching models (Auerbach, 1993; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2018). Mahboob and Lin (2016) further contend that such ideologies, developed mainly within English-speaking contexts, may not be universally relevant. This critique has stimulated a growing body of research that re-evaluates the pedagogical role of L1 and highlights its potential as a cognitive, linguistic, and affective resource. Theoretical frameworks underpinning this shift include multilingual competence (Cook, 2008), cognitive and psycholinguistic models (Cummins, 2007), and sociocultural theories that emphasize scaffolding and collaborative interaction (Antón & DiCamilla, 1999).

Empirical evidence has further substantiated these theoretical claims. Extant research demonstrates that the judicious and purposeful use of L1 can facilitate comprehension, lower anxiety, and enhance student engagement (Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). Despite these findings, many educational institutions maintain strict “English-only” policies, sometimes formalized through language pledges, to simulate immersion (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). Such restrictions often undermine students’ confidence and constrain their use of effective cognitive strategies (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Furthermore, teacher training programs often provide limited guidance on integrating L1 meaningfully, leaving instructors to make such decisions intuitively rather than through informed pedagogical reasoning (Lasagabaster, 2013).

In response to these tensions, recent scholarship has called for a more balanced approach that promotes the purposeful and context-sensitive integration of L1 (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Butzkamm (2003) argued that students’ L1 remains one of the most valuable yet underutilized resources in language education, and noted that prohibiting its use deprives them of their strongest cognitive and linguistic asset. Similarly, Cummins (2007) emphasized that, when used purposefully, L1 can “serve as a stepping stone to scaffold more accomplished performance in the L2” (p. 238). Research on translanguaging extends this view by conceptualizing languages as fluid, interconnected, and dynamic resources rather than discrete systems (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Wei, 2015). This means that students can draw on their full linguistic repertoires to construct meaning, sustain interaction, and negotiate understanding in ways that mirror real-life multilingual communication.

Although these debates are global, the pedagogical use of L1 remains context-dependent. Institutional policies, classroom composition, and sociocultural attitudes toward language mixing all influence how teachers and students perceive and employ L1. In multilingual settings such as Morocco, where Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic (Darija), Tamazight, and French coexist alongside English as a foreign language, these questions acquire particular significance. Despite this multilingual reality, English language teaching has traditionally reflected a monolingual orientation that privileges English-only instruction. In practice, however, both teachers and students frequently resort to Moroccan Arabic to clarify meaning, manage classroom interactions, or build rapport (Benlabchir & Maliki, 2025; Elouardi et al., 2023; Khalid et al., 2024). Against this backdrop, the present study investigates Moroccan EFL high school teachers’ and students’ perceptions of using Moroccan Arabic (L1) in English language classrooms, and explores the extent to which their views converge or diverge. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of Moroccan EFL high school teachers and students regarding the use of Moroccan Arabic in the EFL classroom?
- To what extent do their beliefs coincide or diverge concerning the pedagogical role of L1 use in English language teaching/learning?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The second section reviews key theoretical and empirical studies on L1 use in foreign language classrooms. The third section outlines the methodological design, participants, and procedures of data collection and analysis. The fourth section presents and discusses the findings in light of previous research. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings, pedagogical implications, and recommendations for future studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of L1 Use in Language Education

The pedagogical role of L1 in L2 education has long been the subject of theoretical and empirical debate. Early monolingual models treated languages as distinct and often competing systems that advocated strict separation between the first and second language in the classroom. Recent perspectives, however, adopt a more integrative view that acknowledges multilingual speakers' ability to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning. In light of this reconceptualization, language learning is no longer perceived as replacing one linguistic code for another, but as expanding students' overall communicative and semiotic competencies (García & Wei, 2015). This shift is supported by cognitive, psycholinguistic, and sociocultural theories that highlight the facilitative role of L1 in L2 learning. From a cognitive standpoint, Cummins' (2007) Interdependence Hypothesis suggests that skills and knowledge acquired in L1 can transfer to L2 through shared competencies. Similarly, Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis emphasizes the value of L1 in helping students plan, organize, and refine ideas prior to L2 production, which in turn promotes linguistic precision and deeper processing.

Complementary insights from sociocultural theory reinforce this view. Vygotsky's conception of learning as a socially mediated process underscores the role of language in cognitive development, where L1 serves as a key tool for scaffolding and collaborative problem solving. Using L1 enables students to function within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by facilitating mutual support, negotiation of meaning, and internalization of new linguistic forms (Antón & DiCamilla, 1999). Translanguaging and multilingual approaches extend these foundations by demonstrating how students mobilize their linguistic repertoires to interpret classroom discourse, construct identities, and engage in communication (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Wei, 2018). These perspectives reposition L1 from a source of interference to a pedagogical resource that enhances comprehension, participation, and inclusion.

2.2. The Role of L1 in L2 Education

Beyond theoretical perspectives, empirical research provides further evidence for the pedagogical, cognitive, and affective merits of L1 in L2 education. Storch and Aldosari (2010) found that Arabic EFL learners used L1 for cognitive, social, and procedural purposes, and argued that prohibiting its use deprives both teachers and students of an essential learning aid. Similarly, Antón and DiCamilla (1999) observed that adult learners of Spanish relied on L1 to co-construct meaning and scaffold each other's performance, which sustained engagement and improved comprehension. Soulignavong and Souvannasy (2009) also reported that explanations in the mother tongue enhanced vocabulary comprehension and retention, especially among low-proficiency students. Moreover, Schweers (1999) and Carson and Kashihara (2012) linked the use of L1 to heightened cross-linguistic awareness, while Auerbach (1993) and Meyer (2008) emphasized its role in managing classroom routines and fostering a sense of inclusion. Teachers often employ L1 to explain grammar and vocabulary (Liu, 2008; Demir, 2012), clarify instructions, facilitate understanding, and manage assessments (Levine, 2014). Purposeful L1 use has also been found to lower students' anxiety (Levine, 2003), boost their confidence (Phakiti, 2006), and motivate engagement in cognitively demanding tasks (Corder, 1982).

Research on specific language skills further reinforces these conclusions. In speaking, Al Masaeed (2016) observed that Arabic learners used their L1 to sustain L2 discourse and manage conversational flow. In writing, Wang and Wen (2002) found that Chinese students resorted to L1 for planning, organizing, and revising their compositions. In reading, Turnbull and Sweetnam Evans (2017) demonstrated that L1-based discussions fostered deeper comprehension and critical interpretation, while in listening, Gündüz and Kılıçkaya (2021) revealed that giving instructions in L1 helped A2-level students better understand the tasks and improve their listening comprehension. These findings have shifted scholarly focus from whether L1 should be used to how, when, and for what pedagogical purposes it can most effectively support L2 learning. This growing body of evidence has also prompted increasing interest in how teachers and students perceive L1 use, an attitudinal dimension that has become central to understanding classroom language practices.

2.3. Attitudes toward the Use of L1 in L2 Education

Attitudinal research reveals a broad support among both teachers and students for the judicious use of L1 when it serves clear pedagogical purposes (Liu & Zeng, 2015; Tsagari & Diakou, 2015; Yao, 2011; Mahmoud et al., 2024). Students often favor a balanced approach that allows limited L1 support within primarily L2 instruction. Chiou (2014), for example, surveyed 966 Taiwanese university students and found strong approval for moderate L1 use, particularly among lower-proficiency learners. Similar results were reported by Lee and Macaro (2013), who noted that while advanced students preferred more L2 exposure, most still valued L1 for clarity and explanation. Prodromou (2002) likewise found that Greek students' preference for L1 use decreased as their proficiency increased, reflecting a gradual shift toward L2 autonomy. Studies in Saudi Arabia corroborate these findings, with students perceiving L1 use positively, especially when it facilitated their understanding of complex ideas or encouraged classroom participation (Haifa, 2010).

Teachers' attitudes closely align with those of their students. Despite Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) ideals emphasizing exclusive target-language use (Nunan, 1991; Richards, 2006), many teachers now view selective L1 use as a legitimate and effective strategy. Copland and Neokleous (2010) and Vassiliou (2010) found that teachers in Greece and Cyprus used L1 to explain grammar, manage behavior, and provide affective support. Similar attitudes were observed in Thailand and the Philippines, where teachers perceived code-switching as a practical means of clarification and reducing anxiety (Abellana & Tarusan, 2023; Promnath & Tayjasanant, 2016). Teacher experience and professional development were also found to shape these attitudes. Trent (2013) reported that teachers appreciated having the autonomy to determine when to employ L1, while Miri et al. (2017) demonstrated that reflective practice encouraged a shift from viewing L1 as a constraint to recognizing it as a facilitative pedagogical tool.

This growing consensus among teachers and students challenges early CLT prescriptions of strict L2 only instruction. Scholars now argue that judicious L1 use complements communicative principles by enhancing interaction, comprehension, and learner engagement (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Macaro, 2005; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). Indeed, advocates of total immersion have later acknowledged the cognitive and affective benefits of incorporating L1 in L2 education (Atkinson, 1993; Auerbach, 1993; Burden, 2000; Mattioli, 2004). As Carson and Kashiwara (2012) and Ali (2022) note, contemporary EFL classrooms now regard L1 not as an impediment but as an essential pedagogical asset that supports comprehension, reduces anxiety, and builds confidence. In line with this reasoning, McMillan and Rivers (2011) call for the adoption of flexible language policies that empower teachers and students, rather than administrators, to decide which languages, including L1, should enter the classroom.

2.4. The Use of L1 in the Moroccan EFL Classroom

In Morocco, English has gained notable prominence as both an academic subject and a global lingua franca. It is taught within a multilingual ecology where Standard Arabic, Moroccan Arabic (Darija), Tamazight, and French coexist in complex sociolinguistic hierarchies. English instruction begins at lower-secondary education and continues through university. Despite this linguistic diversity, Moroccan EFL pedagogy has traditionally reflected monolingual ideologies that promote “English-only” instruction and often discourage classroom use of Darija or other local languages.

Recent studies have begun to question this monolingual orientation by investigating how teachers and students perceive and employ L1 in Moroccan classrooms. Although still limited in scope, this body of work aligns with international findings emphasizing the strategic and facilitative functions of L1 in L2 education. Khalid et al. (2024), for instance, combined survey data from 132 students with interviews from seven teachers. Their findings revealed that the vast majority of students supported using Darija for clarifying vocabulary and grammar rules, while teachers emphasized its role in bridging comprehension gaps and enhancing classroom participation. Badda and Vázquez (2024) reported that Moroccan middle school teachers perceived translation to L1 positively when applied in short tasks, particularly at the start or end of lessons and in culture-based reading activities. Benlabchir and Maliki (2025), using a mixed-methods design that combined teacher questionnaires with experimental writing tasks, found that integrating L1 improved motivation, confidence, and task engagement, especially among lower proficiency students who benefited from L1-based scaffolding.

Complementary qualitative and experimental studies further reinforce these insights. Elouardi et al. (2023) found that delivering classroom instructions in Darija improved students' comprehension and fostered an inclusive learning environment. El Aeraj and Kesbi (2025) demonstrated that controlled teacher code-switching between Moroccan Arabic and English significantly enhanced vocabulary acquisition and retention in both immediate and delayed post-tests. Laghman (2016), on the other hand, observed persistent English-only orientations in certain schools, with teachers rarely using Arabic during instruction to translate new or difficult concepts. Abdellaoui (2023) similarly noted that translation and L1 recourse remain “cognitively and practically unavoidable” in Moroccan classrooms, with most teachers favoring moderate, purposeful L1 use to reduce cognitive load and facilitate understanding.

These studies indicate that Moroccan Arabic serves as a strategic and supportive resource, used for instruction, clarification, classroom management, and reassurance, particularly valuable for lower proficiency students and cognitively demanding tasks. Nevertheless, the Moroccan evidence base remains narrow, characterized by regional samples, single perspective designs, or classroom-based action studies that focus on either students or teachers, but rarely, if ever, both. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates Moroccan high school teachers' and students' perceptions of L1 use in EFL classrooms and explores the extent to which their views converge or diverge in practice.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive design with comparative analysis to investigate Moroccan EFL high school teachers' and students' perceptions of using Moroccan Arabic (Darija) in English classrooms. This design was chosen to allow for the examination of perceptions across two groups who share similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds but occupy different pedagogical roles. By comparing their responses, the study sought to identify areas of convergence and divergence in beliefs about the pedagogical value of L1 use in EFL instruction.

3.2. Participants

Data were collected from five public high schools located in four Moroccan cities: two in Beni Mellal, one each in Marrakech, Kenitra, and Rabat. The final sample comprised 79 second-year students and 15 EFL teachers. Among the students, 50 were female (64%) and 29 male (36%). The majority were 17 years old ($n = 62$; 78%), followed by 18-year-olds ($n = 16$; 21%) and one student was 19 (1%). The teacher sample included nine males (60%) and six females (40%), whose teaching experience ranged from 5 to 20 years. Six participants were between 25 and 30 years old (40%), seven were aged 30 to 45 (47%), and two were above 45 (13%). All participants reported Moroccan Arabic (Darija) as their first language and were selected through convenience sampling based on accessibility and willingness to participate.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Two questionnaires (one for students and one for teachers) were used to collect data. Each instrument was made of two main sections: (a) demographic information and (b) a perceptions inventory. Students' questionnaire included seven items in total. The first three gathered demographic information (gender, age, and first language), while the remaining four focused on students' perceptions regarding the use of Moroccan Arabic in the EFL classroom. These items explored (1) whether students support the use of Moroccan Arabic, (2) how frequently they believe it should be used, (3) whether they perceive it as beneficial to their learning, and (4) how it helps them improve their overall EFL learning. All questions were closed-ended yes/no or multiple-choice items, and respondents selected the options that best reflected their opinions (see Appendix A). Teachers' questionnaire followed a parallel design with two sections. The first collected demographic data (gender, age, teaching experience, and first language), while the second consisted of six items addressing teachers' perceptions and practices concerning L1 use in EFL classrooms. Questions examined (1) teachers' views on whether English should be exclusively used, (2) their perceptions of the pedagogical value of L1 use, (3) preferred frequency of L1 use, (4) their own use of Moroccan Arabic in class, (5) the specific purposes for which it is employed, and (6) the situations where their students are permitted to use L1. All items were closed-ended with multiple-choice or Yes/No responses, followed by optional comment boxes for elaboration (see Appendix B).

Prior to administration, both questionnaires were reviewed by five field experts (a Moroccan English-language supervisor and four experienced EFL teachers) to confirm content validity, clarity, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Minor revisions were made based on their feedback. A pilot study involving 20 students and 5 teachers, who were not part of the main sample, was also conducted to assess instrument reliability and comprehensibility. All participants reported that the questions were clear and relevant, and no further revisions were required. The questionnaires were then administered online via Google Forms, and data collection spanned four weeks. The student questionnaire initially yielded 93 responses, of which 79 complete submissions were retained for analysis. All 15 teacher responses were complete and therefore included in the dataset. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarize participants' responses, and comparative analyses were conducted to identify areas of convergence and divergence between students' and teachers' perceptions.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Students Perceptions' of L1 Use in the EFL Classroom

The analysis of students' responses revealed a generally positive orientation toward the use of Moroccan Arabic (Darija) in English language classrooms. As shown in Table 1, students were initially divided in their attitudes, with 51% favoring the inclusion of Darija and 49% opposing its use and preferring an English-only classroom policy. This near-even split reflects the coexistence of two pedagogical ideologies, one grounded in monolingual

immersion principles that prioritize maximum English exposure, and another informed by classroom realities where L1 remains a practical learning resource.

Table 1

Students' preference for L1 use in the EFL classroom

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	40	51%
No	39	49%

However, when the same students were asked about the extent to which Moroccan Arabic should be used in class, their perspectives shifted considerably. As presented in Table 2, more than half (54%) indicated that L1 should “always” be used, and 12% preferred “often” use. About 23% chose “sometimes,” while only 11% supported “rare” use. No participant rejected L1 entirely.

Table 2

Students' perceptions of the frequency with which L1 should be used in the EFL classroom

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Always	42	54%
Often	10	12%
Sometimes	18	23%
Rarely	9	11%
Never	0	0%

The discrepancy between the two questions, one addressing general preference and the other frequency, suggests a subtle but meaningful tension. Some students may conceptually advocate the English-only ideal, an ideology often promoted institutionally, yet adopt a more pragmatic stance when confronted with real classroom challenges. This duality echoes Ellis (2008) and Macaro (2009), who argue that students may internalize monolingual discourse while still using their first language as a cognitive and affective support when needed. The fact that no respondent opposed L1 use altogether further indicates a shared awareness of its pedagogical value. Students appear to understand that Moroccan Arabic does not replace English but rather facilitates learning. This finding resonates with Macaro's (2009) notion of the “optimal use” zone within the code-switching continuum, where selective and purposeful recourse to L1 supports second language development without compromising communicative objectives.

Students also demonstrated strong beliefs regarding the instructional value of Moroccan Arabic. As shown in Table 3, 87% of respondents stated that the use of L1 helps them learn English more effectively, while only 13% disagreed. This high level of endorsement positions L1 not as a fallback strategy but as a learning tool that supports linguistic development.

Table 3

Students' perceptions of L1 utility as a learning tool

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	69	87%
No	10	13%

When asked to identify the specific areas where L1 contributes most to their English learning, the majority of students highlighted its usefulness in vocabulary comprehension (75%) and clarifying grammar rules (12%) (see Table 4). Beyond its cognitive benefits,

students' responses also emphasized the affective and motivational dimensions of L1 use. 70% reported that Moroccan Arabic increases motivation to participate, 22% associated it with comfort and confidence, and 8% believed it reduces classroom anxiety. These findings align with Cook (2001) and Nation (2003), who argue that strategic and judicious L1 use facilitates lexical acquisition and enhances grammatical understanding, especially for lower-proficiency students. These findings also corroborate earlier research by Schweers (1999) and Burden (2000), who explain that first language mediation fosters a psychologically supportive learning environment that encourages engagement and risk taking.

Table 4

Students' views on the functions of L1 in EFL learning

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
It helps me understand grammar rules	10	12%
It helps me understand new vocabulary	60	75%
It makes me feel more confident and comfortable	18	22%
It reduces my stress and anxiety in EFL classes.	7	8%
It motivates me to participate more actively in class	56	70%

The analysis of students' responses points to a pragmatic and function-oriented view of Moroccan Arabic. Rather than perceiving L1 as an obstacle to communicative competence, students regard it as a mediating tool that enhances understanding, boosts confidence, and increases willingness to engage. In the Moroccan EFL context, where classroom instruction remains the primary avenue for English exposure, such supportive functions may be indispensable for effective learning.

4.2. Teachers' Perceptions of L1 Use in the EFL Classroom

The second strand of analysis examined Moroccan high school teachers' attitudes and practices regarding the use of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms. Overall, the findings revealed a flexible and pedagogically oriented stance toward L1, with most participants rejecting strict monolingualism and endorsing selective integration of Darija as a learning scaffold.

When asked whether only English should be used in EFL instruction, 10 teachers, representing 66% of the sample, opposed English-only policies, while 5 (34%) supported them (Table 5). This distribution suggests that most teachers value a bilingual approach and resist monolingual ideology. Such views are consistent with recent bilingual and translanguaging scholarship, which argues that restricting multilingual learners to the target language is neither developmentally sound nor contextually appropriate in non-immersion settings (Butzkamm, 2003; Storch & Aldosari, 2010).

Table 5

Teachers' preference for monolingual instruction in the EFL classroom

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	5	34%
No	10	66%

Moreover, 74% of teachers believed that the use of L1 improves students' learning outcomes, whereas 26% disagreed (Table 6). In their comments, many emphasized that occasional reliance on the mother tongue, particularly through translation, helps low achieving students overcome comprehension barriers. However, teachers also cautioned against overuse,

describing L1 as a scaffold that should support, not replace, exposure to English. As one teacher explained, “I try to keep English as much as possible, but when students look lost, I use Darija and it makes a big difference. Once they understand the idea, I go back to English. It’s just a bridge, not the main road.” Similarly, another participant noted, “Sometimes I use Darija to make sure everyone understands the instructions or a difficult word. But I always repeat it in English so students get used to hearing and using the language.” This balanced stance reflects notions of “principled bilingualism” and focus-on-form instruction (Cook, 2001; Nation, 2003), where L1 is used to facilitate learning without undermining English exposure.

Table 6
Teachers’ perception of L1’s usefulness

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	11	74%
No	4	26%

Regarding how often L1 should be used, teachers preferred selective and purposeful use. The largest proportion (68%) reported that L1 should be used only when necessary, while 20% believed it should be used sometimes. Very few selected always (6%) or frequently (6%), and none favored rare or oftentimes (Table 7). This careful moderation demonstrates that teachers support a controlled and intentional use of the mother tongue, while still upholding English as the primary medium of instruction. Furthermore, almost all respondents agreed that English should predominate.

Table 7
Teachers’ preferred frequency of L1 use in the EFL classroom

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Always	1	6%
Oftentimes	0	0%
Sometimes	3	20%
Frequently	1	6%
Rarely	0	0%
Only when necessary	10	68%

Interestingly, despite supporting L1 use theoretically, only 26% of teachers reported actually using L1 in their own classes, while 74% claimed not to use it at all (Table 8), indicating a clear gap between belief and practice. This discrepancy echoes what Macaro (2005) terms as a “cognitive dissonance” between theoretical ideals of English-only practice and the practical realities of teaching multilingual classrooms. It may also reflect either self-reported underuse due to institutional pressures and language-policy ideologies, or socially desirable responses favoring English-only norms, as Deller and Rinvolucris (2002) note, “many teachers have continued to use the mother tongue because it is both necessary and effective. However, teachers may well have been using it privately and secretly — and certainly not in front of inspectors or colleagues!” (p. 3).

Table 8
Teachers’ self-reported use of L1 in class

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Yes	4	26%
No	11	74%

Teachers were also asked about the purposes for which they use Moroccan Arabic and identified many (Table 9). The most frequently reported were maintaining discipline (100%), creating a supportive and inclusive environment (80%) and giving instructions or administrative information (40%). Fewer teachers used L1 to explain difficult or new vocabulary (33%), while others reported using it to give feedback (20%). In the open comments, teachers added that the use of L1 helps with checking comprehension, reducing anxiety, and providing cultural clarifications. One teacher explained, “I sometimes use Darija to make sure students really understand a concept before moving on.” Another noted, “It helps calm students when they feel nervous or frustrated during a lesson.” A third participant added, “I also use it to explain cultural points that English alone doesn’t cover, so students can connect better with the material.” These findings mirror those reported in international and national EFL contexts, where L1 is often used for classroom management, clarification, and affective support (Benlabchir & Maliki, 2025; Demir, 2012; Khalid et al., 2024; Liu, 2008; Phakiti, 2006; Soullignavong & Souvannasy, 2009; Tang, 2002).

Table 9
Teachers’ rationales for L1 use

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
To explain new or difficult vocabulary	5	33%
To explain grammar rules	0	0%
To give instructions/administrative information	6	40%
To support classroom management and maintain discipline	15	100%
To provide corrective or evaluative feedback	3	20%
To create a supportive and inclusive classroom	12	80%

With regard to students’ use of L1 in the classroom, teachers adopted a regulated but flexible approach. All respondents allowed Darija during pair work activities, and 73% during group work tasks, but none permitted students to ask questions in L1 during classroom instruction (Table 10). In the comments section, some teachers reported that the use of L1 is also permitted during casual interactions. As one teacher explained, “My students use Darija to chat during group activities, and I sometimes use it to make jokes. It helps keep the class relaxed and friendly.” These responses indicate that teachers tend to regulate L1 use according to task type, restricting it during full class instruction but tolerating it during collaborative activities that demand negotiation of meaning.

Table 10
Situations where student may use L1

Response	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
When students ask questions or seek clarification during lessons	0	0%
During paired or partner activities to discuss or complete tasks	15	100%
During group work or collaborative projects	11	73%

Overall, teachers perceive L1 as a supportive pedagogical resource but enact it cautiously. Their beliefs align with contemporary bilingual pedagogy, yet their self-reported classroom practices reflect ideological pressures, institutional expectations, and the desire to

preserve English exposure. The resulting tension illustrates the complex reality of bilingual classroom management in Moroccan EFL contexts.

4.3. Correlation and Divergence between Students' and Teachers' Perceptions

A comparative analysis of the two datasets reveals a broad convergence in attitudes but notable discrepancies in expectations and classroom practices. Both students and teachers recognize the pedagogical utility of judicious L1 use in EFL classrooms. They agree that the mother tongue can facilitate comprehension, reduce anxiety, and support struggling students. At the same time, both groups also express concerns that overreliance on Darija may hinder students' communicative competence and limit exposure to English. Thus, neither group adheres to extremist positions; rather, both advocate a balanced, context-dependent approach. Despite this alignment, clear differences emerge regarding the extent and preferred functions of L1 in the classroom. Students display a strong preference for regular L1 use, motivated by emotional comfort, cognitive clarity, and faster task completion. Teachers, in contrast, endorse a more restrained stance. While they recognize the pedagogical value of the mother tongue, they perceive it as a support mechanism that should be used "only when necessary," mainly for explanation, classroom management, and affective reassurance. This divergence reflects the inherent asymmetry of classroom authority: teachers balance pedagogical ideals with institutional expectations, whereas students respond from an experiential perspective shaped by comfort and comprehension.

The largest gap appears in reported practice. Despite strong theoretical approval of selective bilingualism, only a minority of teachers claim to use L1 regularly. This belief-practice discrepancy echoes broader findings in the literature. As Turnbull and Dailey-O'Cain (2009) argue, teachers often operate within a "bilingual reality" while feeling pressure to perform an English-only identity, particularly in systems where the mother tongue is still stigmatized as pedagogically inferior. In the present study, such tensions may stem from inspection culture, entrenched communicative language teaching norms, or fear that students may over depend on translation.

Taken together, the results suggest that Moroccan EFL classrooms are experiencing a gradual shift toward bilingual pragmatism. Both students and teachers acknowledge that strategic L1 use can enhance cognitive processing, foster emotional security, support low-proficiency students, and facilitate complex explanations. In contexts such as Morocco, where authentic exposure to English outside school remains limited, selective use of the mother tongue appears to serve not only as a compensatory strategy but also as a necessary scaffold enabling access to content. Nevertheless, ambivalence remains. Students fear that too much L1 might impede fluency, and teachers worry that scaffolding could become dependency. This duality illustrates the persistence of monolingual ideologies, long embedded in policy and teacher education, even as classroom realities evolve toward more flexible bilingual practices.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored Moroccan high school students' and teachers' perceptions of using Moroccan Arabic (Darija) in the EFL classroom. The findings revealed a dual reality. Both groups recognize the cognitive, affective, and communicative benefits of L1 use, yet hesitation remains evident, especially among teachers, whose classroom practices do not always reflect their supportive attitudes.

These conclusions carry several implications for EFL teaching and policy. First, the strong support for L1 use from both students and teachers indicates that bilingual practices should no longer be considered as remedial or informal alternatives to English-only instruction. When used purposefully, whether through translation, code-switching, or translanguaging, Moroccan Arabic can enhance comprehension, reduce affective barriers, and promote student

engagement without undermining communicative goals. Second, the observed gap between teachers' perceptions and their actual classroom practices highlights the need for practical, and professional development. Pre-service and in-service programs should provide workshops and trainings on when and how L1 can be integrated effectively, as well as professional networks and forums where teachers can discuss challenges, share experiences, and develop principled approaches to bilingual pedagogy. Third, rigid English-only policies may be counterproductive in contexts where students share a common L1 and have limited exposure to English beyond the classroom. Moroccan educational authorities are therefore encouraged to implement context-sensitive language policies that acknowledge the pedagogical value of Moroccan Arabic while continuing to support English proficiency. Such measures can enhance equity, student participation, and overall learning outcomes. Finally, further research is needed to investigate how student proficiency, teacher experience, and task type influence the pedagogical utility of L1. While this study demonstrates clear benefits for beginner and intermediate learners, its role in advanced EFL contexts warrants careful consideration, where, as Brown (2007) notes, L1 use may require greater restraint.

In sum, these findings contribute to the growing call for a re-evaluation of monolingual ideologies in EFL education. Judicious and purposeful use of L1 is not an obstacle to English learning, but a bridge toward it. And so, after decades of exclusion, one question remains: was it truly the mother tongue that reformers rejected, or simply the way in which it was used?

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Appendices

Appendix A

Students' questionnaire

Part One: Background Information

Please, put a check (✓) in the appropriate box.

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 17 ☐ 18 ☐ 19 ☐ Other (please specify): _____
3. First Language: ☐ Tamazight ☐ Moroccan Arabic (Darija)

Part Two: Perceptions' Inventory

1. Would you like Moroccan Arabic to be used in the EFL classroom?
☐ Yes ☐ No
2. If yes, how often do you think Moroccan Arabic should be used?
☐ Always ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely
3. Do you think the use of Moroccan Arabic in the classroom helps you learn English better?
☐ Yes ☐ No
4. How does the use of Moroccan Arabic help you in the classroom? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ It helps me understand grammar rules
- ☐ It helps me understand new vocabulary
- ☐ It makes me feel more confident and comfortable
- ☐ It reduces my stress and anxiety in EFL classes
- ☐ It motivates me to participate more actively

Appendix B

Teachers' questionnaire

Part One: Background Information

Please, put a check (✓) in the appropriate box.

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 25-30 ☐ 30-45 ☐ above 45 Other (please specify): _____
3. Teaching experience: ☐ 5-10 ☐ 10-15 ☐ 15-20 Other (please specify): _____
4. First Language: ☐ Tamazight ☐ Moroccan Arabic (Darija)

Part Two: Perceptions' Inventory

1. Do you think only English should be used in the EFL classroom to make learning more effective? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Comments: _____
2. Do you think the use of L1 in the EFL classroom can improve the learning process?
☐ Yes ☐ No
Comments: _____
3. If yes, how often should L1 be used?
☐ Always ☐ Oftentimes ☐ Sometimes ☐ Frequently ☐ Rarely ☐ Only when necessary
Comments: _____
4. As an EFL teacher, do you use L1 in your classes?
☐ Yes ☐ No
Comments: _____
5. When do you use L1? (Select all that apply)
☐ To explain new or difficult vocabulary
☐ To explain grammar rules
☐ To give instructions/administrative information
☐ To support classroom management and maintain discipline
☐ To provide corrective or evaluative feedback
☐ To create a supportive and inclusive classroom
Comments: _____
6. In your classroom, when are students allowed to use L1? (Select all that apply)
☐ When students ask questions or seek clarification during lessons
☐ During paired or partner activities to discuss or complete tasks
☐ During group work or collaborative projects
Comments: _____