

The Position of Moroccan ESL/FL Tutors in Employing the Mother Tongue in Instructing L2

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Abstract: The present study endeavors to investigate the awareness of Moroccan English language tutors with regards to using L1 (the Moroccan Arabic) in teaching ESL/FL in the Moroccan context, the work at hand is believed to be as the first study of its kind in Morocco. There has been a considerable number of studies and counter-studies regarding using the mother tongue in teaching L2 of which a substantial part recommends the monolingual approach which regards English as the only medium of instruction. However, the translanguaging approach, an essential bilingual teaching pedagogy, asserts that the mother tongue can reliably be incorporated into the English language teaching process. Incidentally, multiple sources show that English professors and researchers observe the utilization of first language in L2 classroom to be comparably advantageous. In this context, an online survey questionnaire was used to investigate primarily the approach most commonly implemented in teaching L2 in Morocco. For this purpose, one hundred and ninety six (N = 196) academically qualified and experienced male and female teachers from across different regions of Morocco took part of our investigation. Corresponding results indicated that the majority of the participants are overwhelmingly in favor of employing the Moroccan Arabic, that is, the learners' L1, in teaching L2 for several reasons, mainly to explain new vocabulary and grammar lessons, offer feedback, establish class discipline, and save time. The obtained findings are believed to have a considerable impact on the way language tutors approach their English teaching class especially in ESL/FL context, as it contributes to the existing literature and examines newdata from a novel perspective.

Keywords: ELT, Monolingual, Translanguaging, bilingual, teachers' awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the English language plays a leading role and essential means of communication, which dominates not only media field, but also relationship between people regardless their origins, countries, organizations and other bodies, and without doubt is the key to have access to the world wonders . In this digital era, with the spread of modern technology, where English language takes over the Internet language, where most of the international operations and the global flows of data and ideas are achieved in English language, whether directly or indirectly. On that account, studying ESL/EFL has become, to great extent, a must so as to be an active player in the world. Learning English language comes with rules and principles which orientate the manner it is instructed, for example, the learning and tutoring pedagogic theories and approaches. Thus, this Lingua franca, along with its diverse and rich areas have been notably studied, precisely, that of instructing areas.

Here, a substantial part must be taken into account while instructing the language as an instruction medium. In this respect, there are two major distinctive, opposing pedagogic approaches in the area of English language teaching, which are: the monolingual approach and the translanguaging one. This issue of whether using L1, learners' mother tongue, in teaching L2 is a controversial topic which has been tackled by many theorists, linguists, researchers, practitioners and among others. However, before diving deeply into the two major approaches' perception toward using L1 in teaching L2 in general, then, specifically, from the Moroccan English language teachers' perception regarding using the mother tongue or L1 in teaching L2; one, should primarily take into account the linguistic environment in Morocco. In another word, since independence from France and Spain, the Moroccan linguistic environment has seen serious marketable changes and challenges from the colonizers' languages: French, Spanish, and then English language as a lingua franca, apart from the Moroccan Arabic and Tamazight. This has led to a complex multilingual Moroccan speaker who can speak, to some extent, the Moroccan Arabic with many homogenized words from Amazigh language (first nation language), French, Spanish, and English. Thus, English is regarded as the second foreign language in Morocco; however, its status is getting more and more powerful foundation; also, its existence, popularity is noticeable from its growing speakers' number, mainly among youths.

As mentioned earlier, English as the lingua franca of international affairs, for instance, researches, education, aviation, trade, and sciences, which to a greater extent strengthen its status quo, not only in Morocco, but also around the world (Abu-Talib, 1985). Accordingly, the Moroccan Education System (MES) after gaining the independence in 1956, teaching English language became a priority for the MES, the benefits of instructing English as SL/FL which guarantees a strong and reliable position for Moroccan English language learners (ELLs) among powerful nations (Errihani, 2016); moreover, such clear visions and strategies have a positive impact, in the long run, on all age-groups and walks of life (Benmansour, 1996). Using this powerful language as a vehicle of education, the Moroccan Education System adopted and integrated the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches and other teaching methods which guide and improve students' linguistic repertoire (Littlewood, 2013; Richards and Rodgers, 2014 [1986]). For MES, CLT approaches was regarded unprecedented, advanced and original in the field of ELT programs executed in the MES, since the term CLT means that the old-fashioned teaching way, where the teacher was regarded as the centre of education system, where the target language is seen as the principal mean of interaction in the classroom (Rönn, 2013). MES put strict instructions and measurements for English teachers to employ L2 as the one and the only medium of instruction, claiming that L1 would destroy the fluidity of teaching and learning process, but still a considerable number of Moroccan English Teachers use L1 in teaching L2 when the target language does not convey and meet the lessons objectives. In the same vein, the monolingual approach which is utilized by the Moroccan Education System emphasises on the target language in Morocco. This approach is encouraged by Krashen's (1982) who suggested that employing L1 or the mother tongue in learning L2 ought to be decreased. Brown (1994) assumed that learning process is a sub-conscious actions which could simply be accomplished through interrelation and interaction into the L2.

Also, there is one more debate for increasing and not minimizing L2 employment, in which L1, or mother tongue, must be isolated and separated, since language functions differ from one language to another (Lado, 1957). In another word, the mutual instruction language is English, and there is no place for students' L1 or mother tongue in learning L2, and which ignores, totally, any role of L1 in learning L2. The latter, evoked many researchers to raise questions which challenged the nature colonization monopoly of monolingual approach in teaching process. Accordingly, many voices and approaches have raised in linguistics' field, which advocate the first language usage in teaching L2 due to the growing number of L2 teachers who share the mother tongue or L1 with their pupils (Medgyes, 1994); additionally, according to Auerbach (1993) who emphasised on the effectiveness and advantages motives for employing L1 in teaching L2 in the classrooms for specific objectives. That is to say, several new approaches sought to represent the phenomenon has come out, such as: Pluri-lingualism, trans-lingual practice, and translanguaging (Garcia & Li, 2014). Generally speaking, a bilingual employs more than one tongue in various context whether inside the classroom or in his/her daily basis (Garcia, 2009). Also, Harris (1992) emphasises on the importance of identity and its related topics, for instance, self-awareness of culture and traditions, where the bilingual uses the language not for the sake of speaking it, but as power used within the uttered words. According to Jaekel et al. (2019), speaking more than two languages is a great opportunity for a person to build and develop both L1 and L2 linguistic repertoire simultaneously. Despite the rejectionists to Translanguaging approach, employing L1 in teaching L2 is gaining more and more popularity and recognition in many countries, for instance, in Taiwan (Chern & Dooley, 2014), in Indonesia (Sugiharto, 2015), Canada, the USA, Norway, Egypt, and Morocco

lately in rural areas. The mentioned countries have employed this type of education pedagogy to back and boost learners' linguistic and cognitive repertoire, without forgetting the academic and cultural evolution (Rodriguez et al., 2014).

This study aims to approach closely by investigating Moroccan English instructors' points of view of using L1 (mother tongue) in ESL/FL in the Moroccan context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To date, using L1/mother tongue in teaching L2 has become a controversial issue in language learning context, which gains significant more and more studies and researches from ESL/FL investigators, linguists, and practitioners. In this regard, the two major opposing approaches in the area of English language teaching: the monolingual approach and the very recent bilingual branch, the translanguaging approach. As mentioned earlier bilingual speakers possess the capacity to shift from one language to another in an easy and flexible manner, which lays the foundations to utilize distinct teaching methods in the classrooms' environment. Translanguaging is one of the employed teaching approaches which have been tackled by many researchers and practitioners, and which draw significant regard by them. For instance, the term translanguaging was coined in Welsh region (United Kingdom) in 1996 (Garcia & Li, 2014). For Grasia (2009), the term translanguaging is knowledge formations of bilingual/multilingual speaker to form and convey meaning in communication process. Translanguaging comes with diverse characteristics for bilingual/multilingual speakers. Indeed, it guarantees a profound perception of the content in addition to ameliorate the weaker and fragile tongue through raising it beside the superior language (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging presents 4 advantages which are: (a) it may boost a profound perception of the message meaning, (b) it may assist learners to improve and widen their L2' linguistic skills, (c) it may simplify home-school collaboration, and (d) it could improve L2 students' capacity with the content (Baker, 2011, p. 281-282). Weschler (1997) explains the importance and need of using the mother tongue or L1 to compare, analyse, and translate through creative language classrooms' tasks, in which L2 students learn faster to monolingual approach. Here, the teacher seizes the opportunity to invest in students' L1 everyday life experiences to improve their understandings of L2. Moreover, translanguaging attempts to shift away from preferring English as SL/FL towards acknowledgment of bilingualism/multilingualism methods in learning and teaching L2. There are multiple reviews have advocated advantages of Garcia's approach in promoting L2 learners through the employment of L1 in educational environment; on the other hand, other research back up the monolingual approach as the best and only option for learning, by regarding L1 hindering the learning process. For the monolingual approach, the highest use of second language is promoted because of the fact that the more learners exposed to only L2 context in classrooms settings, the more L2 linguistic features and knowledge they will gain (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Generally speaking, Inbar-Lourie (2010) noticed through many previous studies that teachers used students' L1 for three central aims: first, instructional, for example, to simplify classrooms' tasks and facilitate comprehension; second, clarify and illustrate new grammatical lessons (understanding structures and functions); and the last one, supervising and orienting students through feedback approach, which paved the way to create a comfortable classroom environment where learners learn L2 faster and in an effective way. Velasco and Garcia (2014) in a study directly developed on writing skill of bilingual/multilingual students, where students employed translanguaging pedagogy in pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing stages of their writing task; thus, the outcomes indicated that it functioned as a self-adjusting process through which bilingual students played an active part which led to overcome linguistic challenges and produce their proper text in L2.

Additionally, in other research which have assumed effective outcomes of employing translanguaging in educational background from distinct approaches, for example, the sociocultural approach and the linguistic identity development; the former, in which, Duarte (2019) discussed how youths utilized their linguistic repertoires to prolong classrooms' communication activities, the outcomes of communication activities among learners indicated that students presented and utilized clearly their own experiences and thoughts to build new knowledge. The latter, According to Hornberger and Link (2012), assumed that academic institutions in the USA which employed only English language will hinder learners' bilingual/multilingual progress, whereas translanguaging activities boosted their knowledge through equalizing the L1 and L2 cultures. In the same sense, Creese and Blackledge (2015) revolved around the influence of the latter approach's activities on the personality evolution regarding L2 learners in bilingual environments from sociolinguistic perspective.

In short, as it was stated in the previous studies, translanguaging approach and the perception of teachers using L1 in teaching L2 have revolved around five main points: facilitate comprehension, simplifying grammatical lessons, supervising learners, saving time, and building a strong relationship between teachers and students through identity and

culture, which, according to the previous studies, opened the door to create a comfortable classroom environment where learners learn L2 faster and in an effective way rather than the monolingual approach.

The previous studies which have tackled the English teacher attitudes and perceptions of using L1, the mother tongue, in teaching L2 (ESL/EFL) from the monolingual and tranlanguaging point of view, and which indicated diverse results recommended minimizing or maximizing the amount of L1 in teaching L2 in instruction process. Further study is required as long as all studies have been conducted in many countries around the world; in another word, outside the Moroccan context. Accordingly, bridging this gap in this field, the present study seeks to investigate the view of Moroccan English language instructors in using L1 (Moroccan Arabic) in educating EFL in the Moroccan context. Thus, we employed a questionnaire developed by Alavi (2014) which examines

the amount and effectiveness of L1 in teaching L2 through The Moroccan English teachers' perceptions.

The stated inquiries lead the current investigation in light of the objectives that we have set.

Employing the data we have been to collect, the research questions are revolved around:

- What are the Moroccan English language teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding using L1, the Moroccan Arabic, in L2 learning classroom context?
- To what extent is L1 employed in English language Moroccan classes?
- What are the motives behind the employment of the mother tongue in English language Moroccan classes?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

This descriptive study aimed to investigate the Moroccan English language teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding using L1, the Moroccan Arabic, in L2 learning classroom context. The study was conducted via online survey questionnaire in various Moroccan education institutions from across different regions of Morocco including Universities, high- schools, and English language centres' teachers. The online survey questionnaire was distributed to English teachers through Moroccan English language teachers' Facebook accounts, WhatsApp, and Gmail accounts. It spanned over three weeks period starting from the 9 th of April to the 4 th of May 2021. The sample consists of one hundred and ninety six (N =196) academically qualified and experienced male and female English teachers, aging between 20-60 years old, holding various training and education ranging from Bachelor degree, MA, TEFL/TESOL, and PhD degree holders.

3.2 Instrument and Procedure

The data were gathered through an electronic questionnaire (with two parts) given to pre-selected non-probability convenience teachers sample in various Moroccan education institutions throughout Morocco including universities, high schools, and English language centres' teachers. Due to Corona the global pandemic situation, we could not conduct classroom on site interviews. We used the questionnaire developed by (Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014) which is a self-report questionnaire that investigates the employment of L1 into L2 settings by teachers. The survey is comprised of 22 short statements. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) was originally designed to be based on five point, starting from Never and ending with always. The data were processed through Microsoft Word, Excel (2007), SPSS (20). So in order to investigate the Moroccan English language teaching perceptions of using L1 in teaching L2, we employed the biodata questionnaire which encompasses some interesting elements that generally investigated via teachers: gender, age, education level, and instructing experience in the field. The participants in the online survey questionnaire were asked to demonstrate the degree they employed the mother langue or L1 (the Moroccan Arabic) in teaching ESL/FL in the Moroccan context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The recent study aimed to carry on the path of L2 studies trying to secure a deeper and advanced understanding with respect to the role and capacity of L1, the mother tongue, in learning L2 in classroom environment. More precisely, we investigated, analysed, and processed the data collected in descriptive statistics through Microsoft Word, Excel (2007), SPSS (20). The tables and figures below indicate gender respondents, age brackets, education, teaching experience of the respondents, and the percentage of the responses to each point of 22 questionnaire in depth.

The first part of the questionnaire, the biodata one, consists of four essential parts: gender, age, education, and teaching experience of the respondents. Figure 1 shows the gender distribution of the participants. Out of 196 teachers, 102 of them were females (52%), and 94 were male (48%). As for their age, the most recurrent bracket was between 20-29 (n= 92; 48%), followed by 30-39 year-old teacher making 59 ones approximately (29 %). 36 (18.4%) of the participants between 40-49 years old, in addition to 11 (5.6%) participants 50-60.

Regarding training and education, Figure 3 shows that 42.9 % of the surveyed educators had bachelor's degree in ELT, 32.7 % of the participants with MA, 13.2 % of the participants had TEFL certificate, and 6.8 % had PHD degree in English studies. The participants vary in terms of their years of teaching experience: 84 participants have less than 5 years (43%), 70 participants have between 5 and 10 years (36 %), 33 respondents (17 %) have through 10-20 years of experience, whereas 9 of them (4 %) have more than 20 years of instructing experience (see figure 4).

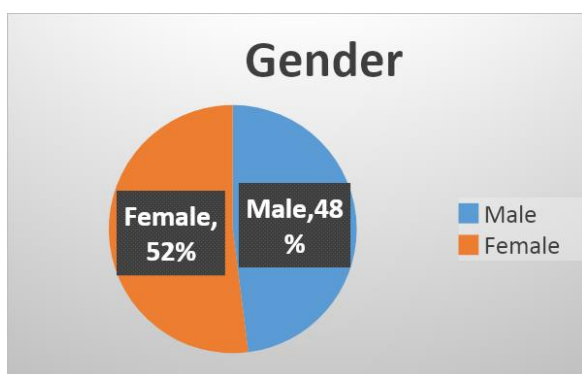


Fig 1. Gender respondents

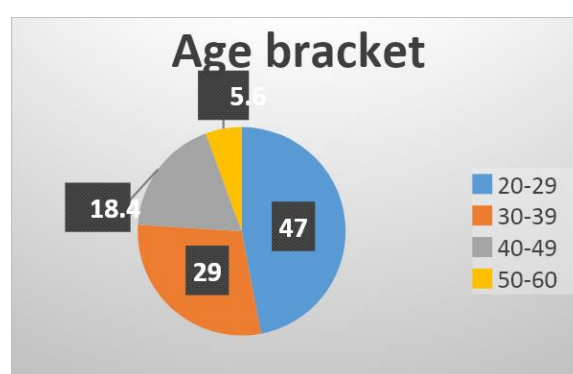


Fig 2. Age brackets

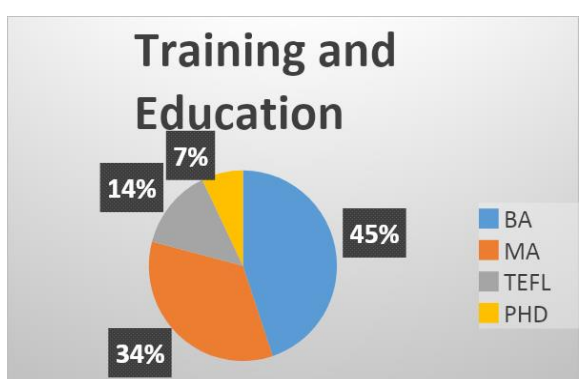


Fig 4. Training and Education

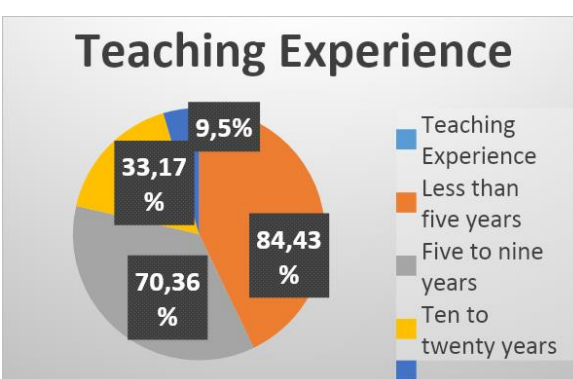


Fig 3. Years of experience

Regarding the second part which tackled L1 functions in L2 learning classroom from the Moroccan English language teachers' perceptions, the outcomes indicated that Moroccan English Language tutors used Moroccan Arabic, learners' L1, mostly to explain grammar lessons, provide clarification, discipline, provide feedback, and save time. In addition, it is interesting to note Moroccan English teachers benefited from learners' mother tongue/L1 to encourage, comfort students, and set an understanding environment with them (see Figure 5). The majority of teachers use Moroccan Arabic in the classroom, more than 170 of the Moroccan English language teachers out of 196 (80-90%) were in favor of employing Moroccan Arabic/L1 in teaching English (see Figure 5). The results indicate the importance of Moroccan Arabic in improving students' English language skills, notably in clarifying new vocabularies (especially abstract ones) and illustrating ambiguous grammar lessons. As the data below indicated, the Moroccan students' mother tongue might be used successfully for various reasons. Indeed, in greater detail, Moroccan teachers of English language used Moroccan Arabic in English classroom context due to the following reasons: up to 88% of the participants were in favor of L1 use to new terminologies, clarify language difficult rules, enforce classroom instructions, make comments, and not to waste time.; on the other hand, between 04-12% of the participants were against L1/Moroccan Arabic use regarding the same mentioned points (see Figure 5).

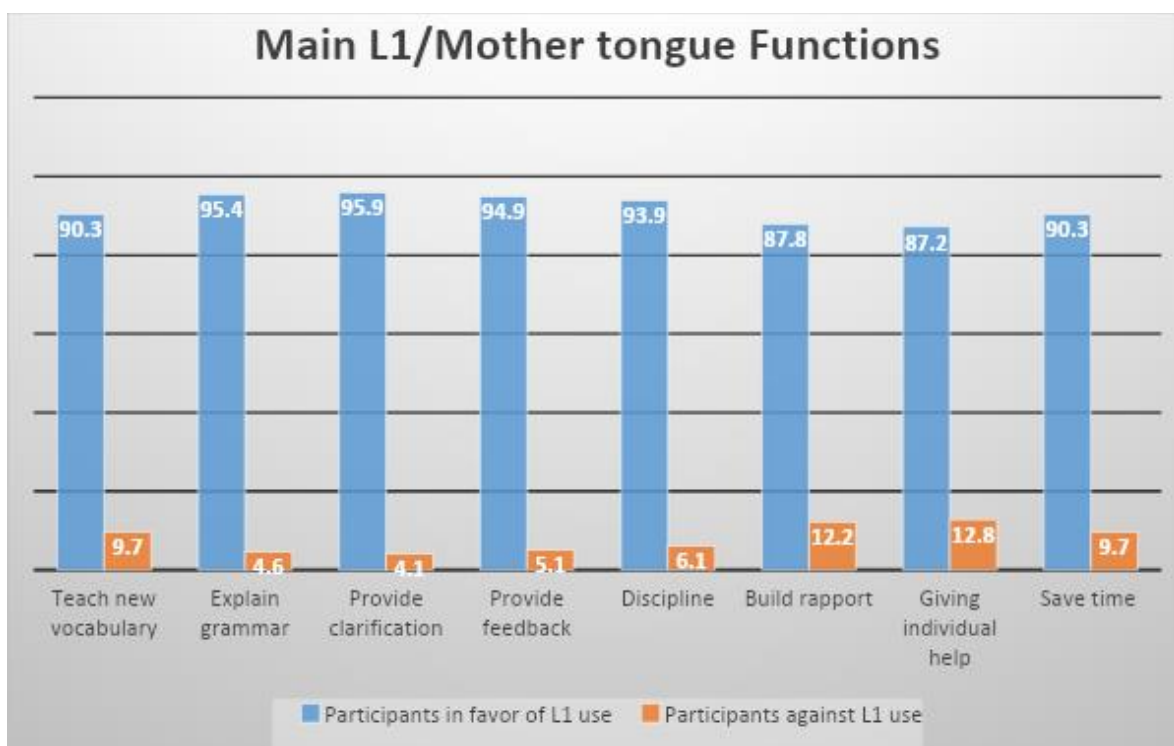


Fig 5. Graphically demonstrates the significant functions of learners' mother tongue in reference to the data collected via the online survey questionnaire.

The findings were surprising since the Moroccan Education System (MES) adopted and integrated the monolingual approach in teaching English, MES put strict instructions and measurements for English teachers to employ L2 as the one and the only medium of instruction, claiming that L1 would destroy the fluidity of teaching and learning process (Benmansour, 1996).

It would appear necessary that the Moroccan Education System and the Moroccan English language teachers are required to acknowledge the advantages and effectiveness of employing the students' mother tongue in L2, mainly in instructing new words and grammar lessons. Moreover, students' L1 or mother tongue can be utilized in class supervising once it is needed to maintain and preserve discipline; not to forget according to the findings the time saved using L1 in teaching L2 which help in gaining more L2 information (input), interaction, and their performance (output).

It could be stated that learners' mother tongue has the capacity to motivate and accelerate L2 learning/teaching process; its usage should be supported and put into consideration. However, this does not imply that L1 employment have to be utilized fully. It could be stated that learners' L1, to some extent regarded as a unique and essential asset, should be used constructively with good judgment and wisdom in learning/teaching process. This is on the same vein of the translanguaging approach, in which L1/mother tongue plays an essential role in learning process. At the same time, L2 instructors ought to put kind of balancing amount between the first language and L2 employment in learning context. Moreover, rational and wise usage could operate such as an efficient and useful psychological agent that may lead to minimize cognitive overburden and students' anxiety (Bruen & Kelly, in press).

In the same respect, according to Velasco and Garcia (2014) in a study regarding bilingual/multilingual students where translanguaging approach used in classroom context, the outcomes of the study indicated that students' L1/mother tongue played an essential part in learning process and which led to overcome linguistic challenges, improve their communication skills, and exploit their own experiences and beliefs to construct new L2' linguistic repertoire. In addition to that, Inbar-Lourie (2010) state that via previous findings that L2 teachers who employed students' mother tongue/L1 benefit from the following points: facilitate comprehension, illustrate unclear grammar lessons, save time; accordingly, that led to produce a comfortable classroom environment where learners learn L2 faster and in an effective way. Moreover, using translation approach in L2 teaching seems to receive significant opportunity as a useful instructional method in improving L2 learning (Bruen & Kelly, in press).

In short, there is a large and considerable number of linguists, scholars, researchers, and practitioners who argue that it does not appear appropriate and reasonable to pay no attention to L1/Mother tongue in learning L2. Therefore, the present study designed to reveal the potentials of utilizing L1 in teaching ESL in classroom context via investigating perceptions along with attitudes of L2 teachers regarding employment of L1 in target tongue context.

5. CONCLUSION

The study attempts to contribute to countless discussions over employing L1/mother tongue in L2 (ESL/EFL) through investigating the attitudes of Moroccan English educators using L1 (Moroccan Arabic) in instructing EFL in Moroccan context. The findings above indicate that the majority of Moroccan English language teachers, regardless their gender, degrees, and their experience use the Moroccan Arabic, learners' L1, to teach L2 (ESL/EFL). Moreover, they employ Arabic to mostly facilitate comprehension, illustrate unclear grammar lessons, provide feedback, and save time. Interestingly enough, the research has demonstrated, in general, the Moroccan English language teachers do not favour the monolingual approach of teaching English language which prohibits the employment of L1 in classroom context, and regarding L2 as the only instruction medium in teaching approaches; on the other hand, they support and practice the translanguaging approach which regards the classroom as a bilingual/multilingual environment where students learn and improve L2 in a comfortable, cultural, and knowledgeable settings. In short, According to Baker (2011), translanguaging presents four advantages: (a) it may boost a profound perception of the message meaning, (b) it may assist learners to improve and widen their L2' linguistic skills, (c) it may simplify home-school collaboration, and (d) it could improve L2 students' capacity with the content (p. 281-282).

This research, still, has some limitations and constraints that must be recognized and can benefit future research in this field. The findings of this online survey should be translated and explained with a clear vision and comprehension of its constraints such as the online survey questionnaire issues, the questionnaires themselves, the data analysis techniques, and the impacts of Covid-19 on such studies. Carrying out further studies in the future need to put into regards the perceptions and attitudes of L2 students employing their L1/mother tongue in learning L2 in classroom context, and conducting face-to-face interviews and class observation with Moroccan English Language teachers in many part in Morocco.

Regardless the mentioned limitations, the research indicates the essential suggestions for English language teachers, concerning the coordinating mechanism of the mother tongue/L1 employment on L2 learning. In short, L2 teachers should change their attitudes regarding L2 students as deficient monolingual; at the same time, we, as English language instructors, are required to see L2 learners as bilingual/multilingual qualified students according to translanguaging approach. Tutors of ESL/FL are requested to re-evaluate their attitudes and views towards classroom learning context as bilingual/multilingual cultural and social sphere, in which L2 teachers and students benefit of energetic, productive, and academic useful employment of the target language with students' native language.

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