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“Examining Students’ Perceptions on the Use of First Language in  
EFL Private Language School Classrooms”

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Patras, Greece, June, 2022

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*In loving memory of my father, Chris.*

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## **Abstract**

The conflict around the issue whether the use of L1 should be eliminated or integrated in the learning process of foreign language has been strongly debated in multiple EFL contexts throughout the years. This academic dispute results from the fact that L1 is considered to have both positive and negative impact on language learning. The current research investigated EFL students’ perceptions on the use of First Language (L1) in the context of private language school classrooms in Greece. More specifically, it explored the stances of learners who attend private English lessons in language schools, locally known as ‘frontistiria’, apart from their school curriculum. Questionnaires and class observations were utilized for the purposes of this research targeting at students whose linguistic level of competence varied from B1 to C2 as described by the Common European Framework. The outcomes of the study indicated that the majority of students believe that their mother tongue has a place in the EFL classroom, especially in cases of grammar and vocabulary explanation, as well as in cases of incomprehension and informal socialization. The findings also have important implications for raising awareness of teachers with respect to their students’ needs, thus they could make decisions concerning the right balance between L1 and L2 use. However, the data were also quite vague when the linguistic levels were separately examined. Therefore, it is suggested that future research be carried out.

## **Keywords**

L1, L2, EFL students, EFL classrooms, private language schools, Greece.



“Εξετάζοντας τις αντιλήψεις των μαθητών σχετικά με τη χρήση της πρώτης γλώσσας στις τάξεις των Αγγλικών ως Ξένη Γλώσσα στα Ιδιωτικά Κέντρα Ξένων Γλωσσών ”

Γεωργία Παπαστουγιαννίδη

## Περίληψη

Η διαμάχη γύρω από το ζήτημα του κατά πόσον η χρήση της μητρικής γλώσσας πρέπει να εξαλειφθεί ή να ενσωματωθεί στη διαδικασία εκμάθησης μιας ξένης γλώσσας, έχει συζητηθεί έντονα σε αρκετά εκπαιδευτικά πλαίσια όλα αυτά τα χρόνια. Αυτή η ακαδημαϊκή διαμάχη προκύπτει από το γεγονός πως η χρήση της μητρικής γλώσσας θεωρείται πως επιφέρει θετικό και αρνητικό αντίκτυπο στην εκμάθηση γλωσσών. Η τρέχουσα έρευνα διερεύνησε τις αντιλήψεις μαθητών, οι οποίοι διδάσκονται την Αγγλική ως Ξένη Γλώσσα, σχετικά με τη χρησιμότητα της μητρικής τους γλώσσας στα πλαίσια ενός ιδιωτικού κέντρου ξένων γλωσσών στην Ελλάδα. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, διερεύνησε τις στάσεις των μαθητών που παρακολουθούν μαθήματα Αγγλικών εκτός του σχολικού τους προγράμματος στα ευρέως γνωστά ως «φροντιστήρια». Για τους σκοπούς αυτής της έρευνας, χρησιμοποιήθηκαν ερωτηματολόγια και παρακολουθήσεις των διδακτικών πρακτικών στην τάξη, απευθυνόμενα σε μαθητές των οποίων το επίπεδο γλωσσικής ικανότητας κυμαινόταν από B1 έως Γ2, όπως περιγράφεται από το Κοινό Ευρωπαϊκό Πλαίσιο Ξένων Γλωσσών. Τα αποτελέσματα της μελέτης έδειξαν ότι η πλειονότητα των μαθητών πιστεύει ότι η μητρική τους γλώσσα κατέχει σημαντική θέση στην τάξη της Αγγλικής Γλώσσας, ειδικά σε περιπτώσεις επεξήγησης γραμματικής και λεξιλογίου, όπως επίσης και σε περιπτώσεις που αντιμετώπιζαν δυσκολίες στην κατανόηση. Τα ευρήματα έχουν ως σκοπό την ευαισθητοποίηση των εκπαιδευτικών σε σχέση με τις ανάγκες των μαθητών τους, έτσι ώστε να είναι σε θέση να λάβουν σημαντικές αποφάσεις σχετικά με τη παράλληλη χρήση της μητρικής και της ξένης γλώσσας. Ωστόσο, σε ορισμένες περιπτώσεις τα δεδομένα ήταν αρκετά ασαφή, ειδικά όσον αφορά τις απαντήσεις των

μαθητών ανά γλωσσικό επίπεδο. Ως εκ τούτου, προτείνεται η διεξαγωγή περαιτέρω μελλοντικής έρευνας.

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## **List of Abbreviations & Acronyms**

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

L1: Native Language

L2: Foreign Language

TL: Target Language

## **1. Chapter 1: Introduction**

The use of first language (L1) in English as Foreign Language classrooms (EFL) has triggered considerable controversy and dispute over the last decades (Tzagari & Diakou, 2015). On the one hand, there are numerous researchers (e.g. Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2005) who claim that L1 can have a beneficial influence in the learning process of L2, since it may serve important cognitive, communicative, and social functions in foreign and second language classrooms (Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009), and it can contribute to the process of language learning through a “balanced and flexible use” (Carless, 2007). Consequently, they strongly support the use of L1 in L2 environments. On the other hand, other researchers (e.g. Duff & Polio, 1990; Ellis, 1984) suggest that L2 development can only be achieved through the extensive use of the target language (TL). This was notably observed in the latter half of the last century when the “monolingual” approach gained more popularity, thus bilingual teaching and grammar translation received heavy criticism and considered to have negative effects on the learning process (Shabir, 2017). As a result, decision-makers and educationists stressed more on the use of the target language to teach L2, and thought it was the best way of learning and teaching L2 (Howatt 1984, Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Although the issue of TL exclusivity in the EFL classroom has been at the core of attention for decades (He, 2012), there is still inadequate evidence regarding both teachers’ and learners’ views. This is strikingly observed in the private language sector, also referred to as “shadow education” (Bray, 1999; Buchmann et al., 2010), an expanding educational context that has not received pertinent attention by researchers and policy makers (Tzagari & Georgiou, 2016). To that end, the current research attempts to investigate the perceptions of EFL students in reference to the use of L1 within the settings of a private language school. The significance of the present study is that it attempts to portray the attitudes of EFL learners in a private language school in Greece, as well as to examine the conditions in relation to the use of L1 in the private language classroom. The results are expected to provide important evidence as regards the effects of L1 in the learning process.

## 2. Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 Theoretical framework of L1 use

The dilemma concerning whether the use of L1 should be eliminated or integrated as an *aiding resource* (Cook, 2001) in foreign language classrooms has been heavily debated in the field of applied linguistics, as well as in various EFL contexts throughout the years (Cook 2001; Turnbull 2001; Liu 2008; Varshney & Rolin-Ianziti, 2013; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2017). This debate results from the fact that L1 is considered to have both positive and negative impact on language learning. Researchers against the use of L1 claim that input in the L2 is an important element that enhances language development (Krashen, 1981; Krashen & Teller, 1983; Duff & Polio, 1990). For instance, Cook (2001) suggests that learners are only able to successfully develop L2 when they are exposed to it as if they were exposed to their L1, and therefore, he recommends keeping L1 and L2 as two separate systems in order to avoid interference from the L1. In addition, Krashen (1982) advocates that L2 language learning is achieved subconsciously through L2 exposure, which makes learners focus on meaning and not form. Equally, Ellis (2005:207) supports that “the more exposure learners receive, the more and the faster they will learn; for this reason, there should be no L1 intrusion in the TL classroom setting”.

On the contrary, supporters of the L1 stress that the role of L1 in EFL classrooms is of paramount importance (Nazary, 2008). In particular, they claim that L1 can be used to raise awareness about the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 (Schweers, 1999; Carson & Kashihara 2012), and make learners feel more confident by allowing them to express their feelings and experiences more easily (Schweers, 1999; Auerbach, 1993). Furthermore, in the relevant literature, L1 is also considered to be a highly useful tool for giving instructions, discussing classroom methodology, checking comprehension, controlling students’ behavior, and teaching grammar clearly to pupils (Atkinson, 1987; Macaro, 2005). Alternative reported L1 uses by instructors are those of bridging communication gaps (Nzwanga, 2000), disciplining students (Macaro, 2001) and communicating about grammar, tests and assignments (Levince, 2003, 2014).

On the whole, there is on the one hand evidence suggesting that there are EFL instructors who support that the target language should be the only medium used in the classroom, as the more exposed learners are to English, the more chances are offered to learn it (Ekawati & Setyarini, 2014) and consequently, they are in favor of the so-called “Monolingual Approach” (Nazary, 2008). On the other hand, there are others who are skeptical about the use of L1 or tend to use it



wisely in their classes and they are claimed to be supporters of the "Bilingual approach" (Nazary, 2008). In addition to these two, a third method introduced by Nation (2003) is called the "Balanced Approach". His view is that teachers must respect learners' native language and avoid using any practices that make their native language appear inferior to English, but at the same time, it is the teacher's responsibility to help learners acquire proficiency in English. In this case, a balanced approach is needed, which recognizes both the role of the L1 and the importance of emphasizing the use of the L2 (Nation, 2003).

All things considered, research in the field of EFL identifies that the first language of learners' plays important role in the learning process of L2. Concepts of inter-language and language transfer have been investigated by a number of researchers who have found significant influence of the first language on the L2 learning (Shabir, 2017). Researchers and instructors who are against the use of L1 support that they have strong reasons about it, because they want to emphasize learners' exposure to the target language. Their standpoint is that once students depend exclusively on L1 for help, learning new words or complicated concept of grammar, they ultimately never take risks and negotiate for meaning in the target language. However, despite some negative effects of L1, these empirical studies also suggest that it is not possible to totally exclude the use of L1 in L2 classes, especially when both teacher and students share the same L1 (Shabir, 2017). By looking at the above mentioned academic assumptions, we can realize that there is still great confusion among researchers and practitioners which calls for further research on the topic.

## **2.2 Theoretical review of L1 use in the local context**

The Greek EFL educational framework is unique in Europe and it actually represents Greek parents' and learners' keen interest in foreign language education (Angouri, Mattheoudakis & Zigrika, 2010). Since Greek language is very narrowly spoken worldwide, in the eyes of Greeks, it is important to master at least one foreign language in order to be able to communicate with speakers of other languages inside or outside the borders of their country. Due to its dominance globally, English is expected to provide Greeks with educational, professional, and socioeconomic opportunities, and as such it is the first foreign language they choose to learn (Angouri, Mattheoudakis & Zigrika, 2010).

Within the local context, the use of L1 in EFL classrooms is a subject that has not been extensively researched. For instance, Prodromou (2002), after investigating the attitudes of Greek

EFL students, concluded that the higher the linguistic level of learners, the less their preference for L1 use in the classroom. Moreover, Giannikas' study (2011) focused on primary school students and found that EFL teachers were rather hesitant to enhance L2 use because of traditional teaching styles and adherence to the curriculum. Although L1 was mostly used for instructions, rules and grammar explanations, L2 use was limited to course book corrections and games (Giannikas, 2011). Furthermore, Tsagari & Diakou (2015) found that the majority of learners in secondary state schools believed that their native language in the classroom was extremely helpful, as they felt more confident to express themselves and they could understand complicated tasks better. Nonetheless, the teachers' attitudes and viewpoints varied, given the fact that they differed depending on learners' competency level and their learning requirements (Tsagari & Diakou, 2015).

### **2.3 Overview of L1 use in the private language school classrooms**

In Greek State classrooms, English is a compulsory school subject that is taught until the end of secondary school, approximately 2-3 hours a week. Nonetheless, English language instruction in Greece is also provided by foreign language institutes. Due to the importance of English, learners receive English language education from schools and private language institutions, the latter also locally known as 'frontistiria'. These additional sources of language learning are defined as types of supplementary education provided outside the public sector, whose primary aim is to enhance academic achievement (Mori & Baker, 2010). Private language schools constitute a highly thriving sector in Greece, which targets learners of all ages, but the most common age group is those aged 8 and older. Their purpose is to offer intensive foreign language courses, which are mostly exam-oriented and though they are not compulsory, they aim at training learners in order to be able to sit for specialized exams that will allow them to obtain language certificates, which they will use as proof of linguistic competence (Mattheoudakis and Alexiou 2009). The truth is that state schools provide fewer teaching hours and less intensive courses than private language institutes. According to some studies focusing on the Greek EFL content, about 80% of Greek school children attend foreign language institutes and Greek families spend approximately 880 million euros on foreign language school fees and textbooks (Angouri, Mattheoudakis & Zigrika, 2010).

As already mentioned, although the majority of Greek students nowadays attend English language courses at both state schools and private language institutes, the picture is even more unclear in environments of the private language school sector concerning the applied teaching

practices. Based on the existing research on the topic, it has been stressed that English language learning in frontistiria is mostly teacher-centered, since the instructors have the tendency to fully control communication and to make use of learners’ L1 rather frequently (Tzagari, 2009; 2012; 2014). Nevertheless, Copland and Neokleous (2011) showed in their study that although teachers in private language classrooms were mainly in favor of using L1, such as in cases of students facing difficulties in understanding complex tasks, they also confessed remorse when reverting to L1. Tzagari & Georgiou (2016) investigated teachers’ perceptions and methods in relation to the extent and functions of L1 use in EFL private language classrooms. Evidence showed that despite teachers’ strong beliefs that TL usage should be maximized in the EFL private classroom, they switched to learners’ L1 regularly, arguing that it was an aiding source, served to balance out learners’ difficulties. Furthermore, in Neokleous’ study (2016), the majority of the teachers identified the beneficial role of L1 in the learning process and stressed that it cannot be alienated from the EFL private classroom. In a very recent study by Ebn-Abbasi, Nushi and Fattahi (2022), the results revealed that language institute learners expressed higher enthusiasm and motivation to speak in L2, in contrast to public school students who showed lower levels of L2 willingness but stronger insistence on speaking in their first language. In regards to classroom management techniques, Soleimani and Razmjoo (2016) demonstrated that teachers in private language classrooms warned their students very frequently when they used their L1 and as a means to stress the importance of talking in English, they either ignored them whenever they spoke in their native language or applied the rewarding method, such as buying snacks or some drinks for the whole class in order to encourage them to use the L2 more.

Taking into consideration the existing evidence in relation to L1 use in the private language field, it is once more clear that we are facing a very conflicting subject. And regardless the overwhelming number of frontistiria in Greece, there is very little evidence concerning the way languages are taught and even less in terms of TL exclusivity in the EFL classrooms (Tzagari & Georgiou, 2016; Tzagari & Giannikas, 2017). It is therefore, essential to further investigate students’ perceptions and attitudes about the role of L1 in the EFL private language classroom.

## **2.4 Significance of the current research**

As already discussed, a number of studies have taken into account the attitudes and perceptions towards the L1 use in the classroom. They can be categorized into two genres: those which only attempt to explore the attitudes of language learners, and those which investigate the attitudes of both language learners and teachers (Nazary, 2008). As far as teachers’ and learners’ stances

towards the use of L1 in the EFL classroom are concerned, several studies have been conducted. However, research in the field appears to be quite vague, since in some of these studies teachers and students mention the significance of L1 in terms of learning facilitation (Schweers, 1999; Burden 2001; Hopkins 1989), whereas in others participants seem quite reluctant to use it (Duff & Polio, 1990; Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003; Nazary 2008). Given that inadequate attention has been attracted concerning the private language school sector and the implemented practices, it was pivotal that a research be carried out, attempting to shed light into this growing educational context. And despite the various requests in the literature (Bray, 2003; Tsagari & Georgiou, 2016; Tsagari & Diakou, 2015), the private language field has not yet received the appropriate consideration by researchers or policy makers.

To be more specific, there is narrow availability of adequate number of studies in the existing literature which could provide us with a holistic view of private language institution learners' standpoints. The research findings emerged from studies which investigated private language environments are very limited and contradictory; there are not explicit data with respect to how students perceive the use of their mother tongue in the EFL context (Tsagari & Georgiou, 2016; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2017). Thus, the aim of this research is to analyze students' beliefs concerning the practices followed by teachers as regards the use of L1 in EFL classrooms of a Greek private language school. The importance of the specific study is that it attempts to explore the stances of EFL learners towards the use of L1 within the settings of the private language classroom. Consequently, it could be stated that the study mainly fits into the first category as Nazary suggests (2008); however, in the endeavor to examine learners' perceptions, a better view on the teaching practices applied by instructors is attained, as not only do learners have the chance to provide classroom feedback, but also real-time observations take place as a means to enhance the reliability of the results, an aspect profoundly explained in the upcoming sections. In addition, the current paper tries to give a broader perspective on whether L1 is mostly used by the instructors or the students, a factor which is seldom taken into account (Levine, 2003). Finally, this study will hopefully provide EFL teachers of private language schools with an overview about the advantages and disadvantages in the learning procedure as regards the L1 use in the classroom.

### 3. Chapter 3: Research methodology

#### 3.1 Aims of the research

In order to be able to explore students’ beliefs with regard to the use of L1 in the EFL classrooms of a private language school in Greece, the present study aims to answer the following:

<b>Main question</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are students’ perceptions on the use of L1 in language school classrooms?</li> </ul>
<b>Subquestion 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do learners think that the use of L1 is necessary during the learning process of L2?</li> </ul>
<b>Subquestion 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are students' stances towards the use of L1 by their instructors during the learning procedure?</li> </ul>

The research questions focus on obtaining a clearer picture concerning some important educational aspects as described in the literature (Tsagari & Diakou, 2015). More specifically, the above questions are the cornerstone of designing the survey items addressed to students. Namely, the survey (see Appendix I) targets at the collection of data that could exhibit how helpful the use of L1 is with reference to understanding vocabulary terms, grammar and their teachers’ instructions. In addition, it attempts to investigate students’ stances on occasions when their instructors use L1 as a tool to check L2 comprehension, to explain complicated tasks, as well as tests or writing activities. Last but not least, it is also vital to examine what students think of L1 use by their teachers in terms of classroom management skills and informal socialization.

#### 3.2 The research paradigm

In the research field, the term paradigm is used to relate to the philosophical presumptions or to the basic set of beliefs that steer the actions and define the worldview of the researcher (Lincoln et al., 2011). The present study relates mostly to the principles of pragmatism research philosophy. Pragmatism identifies that there is no single or unique way of explaining the world and that no single point of view can ever give the entire picture since there may be multiple realities, especially in cases of conducting research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In other terms, this philosophical ideology is essentially practical rather than idealistic and for the pragmatist, there may be various or multiple ways for arriving at the reality (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). This can be achieved through subjective, meaning the examination of measurable variables (quantitative methods), or objective means, that is the investigation of a topic in a more exploratory manner (qualitative methods), and some other times could require a combination of

subjective and objective techniques. The researchers can choose the methods, techniques, and procedures that best meet their needs and their scientific research aims (Alghamdi and Li, 2013).

The main idea behind the current research is aligned with the basic ideology of pragmatism, that the best research methods are those that help to most effectively answer the research questions. And in this case, there is no sole interpretation of the issue, since the objective is to explore the learners' views, which are based on their individual skills and needs. Thus, the philosophical view of pragmatists that the world does not form an absolute unity and that researchers have freedom of choice regarding their methods are applicable to the particular study.

Taking the latter into consideration, a richer understanding of the specific research questions could be provided mostly through the use of a quantitative approach; however, some qualitative aspects should be taken into account as well, but in a shorter scale. To be more specific, the theoretical standards of mixed methods research should be taken into account for the construction of the research tools, as "a researcher combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e. g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson et al. 2007, p. 123), so that a complete and clear interpretation of the study can be offered, since only one type of research (qualitative or quantitative) would not be adequate enough to investigate both the stances of learners and the classroom practices. This is also confirmed by Tuckman (1999), who states that the combination of quantitative and qualitative data provide the researcher with a more holistic picture by revealing trends and generalization, as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives. Nonetheless, given that the main focus of the study is to examine students' stances towards the use of L1 during the learning process, the qualitative data should be used as supportive elements so as to cross-check the statistical analysis in real educational situations. Thus, although the research uses both types of data, the quantitative results are the primary source of evidence in order to answer the research questions.

This also leads to another synthesis of methods, namely the use of a flexible and fixed-type research design. With a fixed research design, the construction of the study is pre-determined and known before the collection of data (McCombes, 2020). Flexible designs, on the other hand, allow for more freedom when collecting data. Consequently, regarding learners' beliefs and the extent to which they find the use of L1 necessary, a fixed-type research design will be selected, as the written questionnaires and the variables of it will have to be designed in advance, whereas in

the case of investigating the actual instances of learners’ L1 use in practice, a more flexible design is required, since the answer options cannot be determined.

### **3.3 The research site**

The present study examined the views of EFL learners concerning the use of their L1 in the learning procedure within the premises of a private language school in the northern suburbs of Athens. Learners of the specific language school are taught English two to three times a week, and every teaching session lasts 90 to 120 minutes, depending on the linguistic level. Teachers and students of the language school share the same L1 (Greek). Selection of the specific language school was based on non-random criteria, namely on the researcher’s accessibility to the sampling population, since it is more convenient to reach participants when already working as an instructor in the same teaching environment.

### **3.4 Research strategy**

The selected research strategy was based on the theoretical principles of triangulation. Triangulation is the procedure that attempts to explore and explain complex human behavior using a variety of methods, with a view to providing a more balanced explanation of the research results (Joppe, 2000). It can enrich the study as it offers a variety of datasets to describe varying aspects of a phenomenon of interest, with its central goal being to deliver the same results in the research findings through different methodological strategies (Rothbauer, 2008). The fundamental elements of triangulation are credibility and validity. Credibility addresses the reliability of a study; the validity of a study depends on whether its findings accurately reflect or evaluate the concept or ideas it aims to investigate (Joppe, 2000). Overall, through the use of multiple theories, methods or observers, triangulation can help reduce or even eliminate the impact of fundamental biases arising when one method or one observer is used in a research study (Joppe, 2000).

Subsequently, for purposes of triangulation, quantitative and qualitative data have been implemented in the current study, with higher emphasis placed on the quantitative selection of evidence. More specifically, a closed-type survey in the form of a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to learners. By using questionnaires, we can collect information about people’s knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors objectively (Oppenheim, 1992). The specific survey constituted the means to interpret their personal views concerning the use of L1 by their teachers during the lessons, as well as the frequency of L1 use by their instructors. The questionnaire was

designed accordingly to the Likert-type scale structure and consisted of two parts. The survey items were also designed with respect to the findings of the existing literature in relation to the subject of L1 use in the L2 classroom (Tsagari & Diakou, 2015), as a means to ensure validity, which, as already stated, is assessed through comparison of results of other relevant data or theory (Middleton, 2020). As a matter of fact, the adaptation of pre-existing survey questions can enhance the reliability of a survey, because they have extensively been tested beforehand (Hyman et al., 2006). In particular, the intention was to examine learners’ viewpoints towards the use of L1 in terms of learning vocabulary and grammar, as well as towards their teachers’ use of L1 in cases of checking comprehension, giving instructions, controlling students’ behavior, explaining writing assignments, tests or activities and informally communicating with students.

To further assist the validity of this study, classroom observations were conducted with the intention to support and explain the results of the questionnaire. DeWALT & DeWALT (2002) claim that participant observations can be used to increase the validity of the study, since the observations may allow the researcher to better comprehend the context and phenomenon of the study. The observations aimed to investigate the reasons why learners or teachers use their L1, how they make use of it and on what occasions. Therefore, the method applied was the naturalistic observation type, which is concerned with observing subjects in their natural environment and it focuses on collecting, evaluating, and describing non-numerical data (Bhandari, 2022). In addition, they were non-participant in the form of note-taking observations, since the researcher was taking notes without being involved by any means throughout the learning process.

### **3.5 Data analysis process**

Concerning the procedure of data collection, the questionnaire distribution was held first. However, prior to the survey distribution, a consent form written both by the owner of the language school and the researcher was given to students’ parents to be signed due to data protection regulations. In the first part of the survey, students were asked to provide personal information, such as gender, age, class level and years of learning English. The entire process was completely anonymous, since respondents are more likely to provide truthful answers when their names are unidentified (Cleave, 2012). In the second part, participants were given a list of closed-ended written statements in order to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. As regards the method of analysis for the quantitative data, meaning the learners’ responses to the questionnaire items, descriptive statistics were utilized, “whose aim is



to describe a researcher’s sample” (Katsillis, 2020, p.206) and to summarize the data set in numerical form. In order to achieve this, the data were calculated with the use of SPSS statistical analysis software. Firstly, a summary of the frequency of every variable in numbers was held by counting the number of responses for each answer. Secondly, the average mean of the data set was estimated and finally, the range score was measured in order to check the variability of responses. Furthermore, the results were divided into four groups in relation to the linguistic level, so as to compare the responses of each level individually. Consequently, four classroom observations were held according to each level. Their main purpose, however, was mainly to further assist the quantitative data, thus they were not analyzed into thematic patterns. Their objective was to ensure triangulation as already stated, in order to increase the credibility and validity of the research findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

All in all, it could be suggested that the sequential explanatory strategy was mainly employed. In this approach, quantitative data are collected and analyzed first; then, the results are used to explain the following qualitative phase (Statistics Solutions, 2021). Sometimes, the qualitative stage is valuable in helping to understand unexpected results that may arise in the initial quantitative phase. Once again, the objective is to provide a more complete understanding by using both approaches together, an outcome which would be more demanding if only one was used. The two components are complementary, as the quantitative phase provides generalizability and the qualitative phase provides context to the findings (Statistics Solutions, 2021).

## 4. Chapter 4: Presentation of findings

The following sections of the research paper thoroughly present and explain the data emerged from the results of the student questionnaire after the statistical analysis (Appendix I), as well as the classroom observations (see Appendix II). As a means to rendering validity to the statistical results, four observations were held for each linguistic level. Evidence from the observations will also be described simultaneously with the statistics.

### 4.1 Participants

To answer the research questions, the focus was placed on upper-intermediate (B1-B2) and proficient English users (C1-C2) as listed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). The reason for this selection was based on the idea that a clearer picture concerning learners’ behaviors towards L1 would be provided if the students being examined were relatively independent users of English. This choice was based on the purposive, non-probability sampling technique, in which the participants of the study are selected based on the researcher's judgment (Black, 2010). However, the students and the teachers who participated in the study were randomly selected, since the logic behind simple random sampling is that “it removes bias from the selection procedure and should result in representative samples” (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011:146). Through the combination of these two sampling techniques, a broader and more representative collection of data can be attained.

In the current study, 74 learners in total participated in the survey, which could be characterized as an adequate sample. The vast majority of learners who answered the questionnaire were aged between 13-15 years old (71.6%), who have been studying English for 7-8 years (82.4%). In addition, the participants were mostly female (55.4%), but there were minor differences in the percentages concerning their linguistic level of competence, placing B2 classes on the lead with the slightly highest number of 28.4% (see *Table 1*, Appendix III).

### 4.2 Students’ perceptions on the use of L1

This part of the study exemplifies the data from part II of the student survey (Appendix I) divided into four separate groups, which represent the four different linguistic levels. Thereby, a much clearer view could be provided as regards students’ stances on the L1 use in the foreign language classrooms (see *Tables 2–5 & Graphs 1–4*, Appendix III) based on the answers provided by

learners of B1, B2, C1 and C2 classes accordingly. In addition, the conclusions drawn from the observations are illustrated regarding each level.

#### **4.2.1 B1 students’ beliefs about the use of L1**

By comparing *Table 2*. B1 students’ perceptions on L1 use in foreign classrooms. and *Graph 1* (Appendix III), it is estimated that 34% of the total answers given by B1 learners were positive to the use of L1 during L2 sessions, but there was a very slight difference to the amount of neutral answers, that is 33%. The 20% of learners disagreed with the use of L1, 10% strongly agreed and only 3% strongly disagreed with it. The instances in which B1 students mostly found the L1 use as beneficial were those of grammar rules explanation and the feeling of self-confidence in the classroom. However, they also believed that if their teacher uses the L2 more frequently, it helps them communicate better in English. This is quite contradictory, so the role of observations could provide us with more clarifications.

In B1 classes, the majority of L1 use was observed in occasions of socialization (e.g. jokes) between the teacher and students. An emphasis on word translation was also noticed from both sides; the instructor’s intention was to ensure that learners fully comprehend the context, while students asked questions almost exclusively in Greek. Consequently, the answers given by the students match the general teaching process; students are relying more on L1 to achieve comprehension and to express themselves informally, while at the same time they think that L2 is not used as much as possible. Thus, it could be suggested that on the one hand, learners of this particular level see L1 as a useful aid, but on the other hand, they are also quite uncertain about its value during the learning process.

#### **4.2.2 B2 students’ beliefs about the use of L1**

The general picture of this class is that the majority has doubts concerning the use of L1. In fact, the 39% chose the neutral option (see *Table 3* & *Graph 2*, Appendix III). Then, it seems that at this linguistic stage, learners are ambivalent towards the L1, since there were 27% of negative and 26% of positive answers. The numbers of *strongly agree*, *strongly disagree* options were minimal (6% and 2% accordingly). B2 students were also very positive towards L1 in cases of incomprehension. Therefore, it could be assumed that B2 students are not absolutely certain whether the L1 should be used in the EFL classroom or not, mainly because they have acquired some basic knowledge of the L2.

By observing the teaching sessions, it was evident that students were those who mostly made use of L1, whereas the teacher was constantly encouraging them to use L2 (e.g. she pretended she did not understand Greek). However, again it was noticed that in cases of socialization, L1 was the dominant language. As a result, the findings of the survey were similar to the actual learning procedure, since on the one hand, learners made use of the L2, but on the other hand, they shifted to L1 whenever it was more convenient to them and perhaps this is the main reason why the majority answered neutrally.

#### **4.2.3 C1 students’ beliefs about the use of L1**

The picture with learners of advanced-proficient linguistic competence was quite different and complex in relation to the lower linguistic levels. Learners of C1 classes mostly responded positively; more specifically 34% *agree* answers in average (see *Table 4 & Graph 3*, Appendix III). However, we can notice again that the neutral responses are statistically very close to the positive ones, as the 33% of students were unsure about the usage of L1. The 22% of them disagreed to it, a 7% strongly agreed and lastly, only 4% strongly disagreed. Once more, a contradiction in their answers could be seen: while they agreed that the more exposure to L2 helps them in communication, they disagreed that their instructors made more frequent use of the L1.

During the teaching sessions of C1 and C2 classes, instructors barely used the L1 and students seemed to fully comprehend them. Surprisingly though, learners also appeared reluctant to participate in the lessons using L2, probably due to feelings of insecurity. For instance, in C1 classes, they first wanted to be explained the grammar rules in Greek and then proceed to the exercises, an action which was supported by the teacher with a view to facilitating grammar acquisition. However, it was evident that the instructor shifted to L1 as last resort in order for students to avoid facing any difficulties with their exercises. Therefore, it explains why the majority of C1 students slightly agreed to the use of L1. It may be argued once more that learners being at this level tend to find the use of L1 unnecessary due to the fact that they have obtained some more advanced linguistic skills, thus they are also doubtful about its use in the classroom.

#### **4.2.4 C2 students’ beliefs about the use of L1**

The final results regarding C2 level students were quite similar to those of advanced classes. In particular, 33% answered neutrally as a result of the skeptical view they have on the L1 use in the educational process (see *Table 5 & Graph 4*, Appendix III). What was interesting though with this particular level compared to the others, was the fact that 29% of C2 learners disagreed to its

use in the classroom, which was the highest number observed in the negative answers as a whole. Thereby, it can be stated almost firmly that the higher the level of competence, the more unsettled students feel towards the use of L1 in the classroom (Prodromou, 2002). The remaining results for C2 classes were as follows: 21% answered *agree*, 10% *strongly agree* and 7% *strongly disagree*. Another instance mostly observed in C2 sessions was the factor of socialization; once again, they denied using L2 despite their teachers’ instructions. Finally, in both linguistic levels, namely C1 and C2, students used very frequently the quote “*I don’t know how to say this in English*” (see *Appendix II*), and they would tend to ultimately quit using L2 unless their instructors gave them the exact English rendering of words or phrases. Thus, it might be suggested that students of higher levels may think of L1 as a necessary tool for overcoming their own insecurities, rather than as a useful aid throughout the learning process. Hence, C2 learners selected the neutral option because they feel undetermined about the educational value of L1.

## 5. Chapter 5: Interpretation of findings/Limitations of the study

### 5.1 Students’ general beliefs about the use of L1

At this point of the research, it is substantial to gain some broader knowledge as regards the main outcomes that emerged from all students according to the statements found in the questionnaire (see *Table 6*, Appendix III). In this way, we can draw more general conclusions about their beliefs towards L1. It would also be valuable to compare when necessary the results from Tzagari and Diakou’s study (2015), as some of the statements were adapted from the specific paper in order to render validity to the survey items.

To begin with, 51% of all students agreed that the more frequent use of L2, the more it helps them in building communication skills. In addition, when asked whether their instructors use more the L1 than the L2, 43% of them disagreed. The results are rather similar to those of Tzagari and Diakou (2015), who also identified that learners are very much in favor of constant L2 use in the classroom and that they also believed that their teachers should use L2 at all times. Based on the learners’ responses, it could be suggested that these claims have a valid background concerning the improvement of communication skills. There are numerous studies which have stressed the negative influence of L1; they stated that overuse of L1 reduced the learners’ exposure to the target language input and this had a negative impact on their general performance in L2 (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Furthermore, according to Lightbown and Spada (1999), L2 errors are substantially caused by patterns transferred from L1. Krashan and Terrel (1983) also firmly believe that maximum exposure to the target language in L2 classroom should be emphasized and therefore, they demand the exclusive use of target language when teaching L2.

However, moving on to students’ perceptions as regards the absolute exclusion of L1 during the learning process, we notice that the 42% was against it. In fact, the next statement was asking learners if the instructors should make use of L1 in cases of incomprehension and the 43% agreed. This is also found in the literature; according to other researchers, total deletion of L1 in L2 classroom is not appropriate (Schweers, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Tang, 2002) and L1 should not be excluded from the pedagogy of language education. These studies also claim that without making some, or at least minimal use of L1, teaching L2 becomes a very difficult process. Looking again at the findings of Tzagari and Diakou (2015), we see that the vast

majority of learners demand from their instructors to use their mother tongue when instances of incomprehension occur.

Regarding the feeling of security in the classroom in relation to L1, there is some contradiction between their answers and the actual teaching situation. To be more specific, the 41% answered neutrally; nevertheless, the observations showed that they also had the tendency to see it as a convenient resource to turn to whenever they felt less confident about their L2 skills. Auerbach (1993) argues that L1 provides a sense of security, thus learners feel safer and more certain about expressing their own experiences. In their study, Almohaimeed and Almurshed (2018) proved that advanced learners had a negative view concerning the use of L1 in their English classes, whereas elementary and intermediate learners broadly perceive the balanced use of their L1 positively. Young (1990) discovered that students generally become nervous when they have to use the L2 in front of others. Horwitz et al. (1986) have also found a connection between L2 anxiety and unwillingness to interact verbally. And despite the fact that this tendency is mainly caused by personality traits or general eagerness towards communication, research evidence also seems to support a positive relationship: The most common purpose for using the L1 and allowing students to use it is that it helps the affective filter of younger or weaker learners (Krashen, 1982). Namely, Krashen (1982) states that learners with higher incentive, self-esteem and feeling of extroversion, aligned with lower levels of anxiety, are more expected to succeed in mastering a foreign language. On the other hand, signs of low motivation or self-confidence, anxiety, introversion and inhibition can increase the affective filter and shape a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input which assists in the language development. And even though it is argued that excessive and unsuitable use of the first language causes negative effects on the learning procedure, its minimal use can also be very beneficial, especially to beginners or weak learners, as it helps them overcome their confusions and agitations (Shabir, 2017). Last but not least, the learners in Tsagari and Diakou's study (2015) also confirmed that they felt more relaxed when their mother tongue was used. Bearing both the findings of the existing literature and the current results in mind, we could make two assumptions: the first one is that students felt ambivalent and consequently, the neutral answers outweighed, as their level of competence along with their personal linguistic skills plays an important role in the educational process. The second assumption is that the use of L1 does make learners feel more relaxed, based on both the observational outcomes and the beliefs of other researchers.

Let us now examine the general stances of students as regards the teaching methods. In particular, they agreed that L1 should be utilized when explaining new grammar rules and vocabulary terms (41% and 33% on the instances of grammar and vocabulary explanation accordingly). As mentioned in the above sections, the observations indicated that a great emphasis was placed on L1 use concerning the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. In the literature, strong evidence in favor of its use can be found for the same teaching practices. For instance, Ellis (2008) claims that learners use their prior linguistic knowledge in order to construct and use new language. He also notices that students think in L1 and then translate their ideas into L2 as a means to retain new words. In addition to Ellis, Krashen (1982) also recognizes that there is strong linguistic connection between the L1 and L2 and Cook (1992), states that EFL learners tend to access their L1, while processing the L2. He also advises teachers not to neglect L1 when teaching L2. Similarly, Tang (2002) found that EFL teachers made use of L1 in cases of explaining the meaning of difficult words and complex grammar ideas. He also concluded through his study that the majority of teachers are in favor of L1 use, because in this way, they can help their students understand complicated grammatical phenomena or syntax structures. And finally, Tsigari and Diakou (2015) indicated that students see a place for L1 in the EFL classrooms, especially when explaining grammar and defining new vocabulary. Therefore, we can state with great confidence that EFL learners think of their mother tongue as an extremely beneficial tool for grammar and vocabulary explanation.

As far as reading and writing comprehension is concerned, learners were quite indecisive (42% and 43% neutral answers for reading and writing comprehension accordingly). It is true that both teachers and students tend to use L1 whenever they have difficulty in communication (Dash, 2002). Nonetheless, based on the evidence of the present study, we can assume that learners are not so much affected by the use of their mother tongue in relation to reading and writing. This was also the case with checking comprehension in general (54% neutral responses). As already stated, in the studies of Atkinson (1987) and Macaro (2005), L1 was regarded to be a highly useful tool in terms of knowledge assessment. In the current study though, the particular aspect seems not to match the specific findings. In fact, concerning the aforementioned linguistic skills, we can assert that they apply more to other researchers' viewpoints who take a more neutral standing by claiming that L1 use should neither be prohibited nor be encouraged (Zulfikar, 2019). Furthermore, looking again at the stances of Atkinson (1987), Macaro (2005) and Levince (2003, 2014), using learners' mother tongue in the classroom was also considered a valuable asset in



cases of giving instructions about tests and assignments. However, the present research did not verify this belief; in particular, the 34% of learners answered negatively with respect to activities or tests explanation. Bateman (2008) in his study discovered that his participants were mostly in favor of L2 use in the classroom in order to be more exposed to the target language. In the researcher's point of view, this is relatable to the age of the participants, since they were learners with adequate L2 linguistic skills. Therefore, they perceive the use of L1 in such cases redundant, as seen in Prodromou's study (2002) indicating that in high linguistic levels, L1 seemed less necessary. In addition, although the sample of advanced students investigated by Tsigari and Diakou (2015) expressed their agreement towards L1 concerning reading comprehension, they also seemed unsettled in relation to teaching writing and providing instructions, as shown in the present research. Once again, we can conclude that the factor of linguistic competence is highly influential in relation to what students believe of their mother tongue.

The assertion that the age of students plays an important role as regards the place of L1 in the classroom is also strongly proved through the use of classroom observations for the purposes of this study. It appears that not only learners are affected by their level of linguistic competence but also teachers. In fact, in B1 classes, teachers showed significant willingness to use it as a means to help learners achieve full comprehension. This was not however the case for the rest of the linguistic levels; teachers highly supported the use of L2 during their lessons even though it was not feasible at all times. Boukella (2001) claims that when the use of L1 is not permitted, especially to students at the elementary or beginner stages, or when they are made to use only the target language, they appear to be incapable of communicating and their confusion often leads to great discouragement. They may also feel completely disoriented, isolated and insecure (Boukella, 2001). The overall results in Tsigari and Diakou (2015) demonstrate that the younger the age of students, the more amount of L1 is reported to be used by the teachers. As a result, it is suggested that instructors tend to use more L1 with younger learners, whereas in cases of older students, they seem to reduce the extent of it.

The last two statements were concerned with classroom management and informal socializing. The general attitude of learners towards L1 use in cases of controlling students' behavior was positive (35% agreed on this). Bateman (2008) also identified in his study that L1 should be used when it is important to maintain the class discipline. In addition, Macaro (2001) has stressed the importance of L1 when disciplining students. And the majority of students in Tsigari and Diakou's study (2015) also had a positive reaction towards it. Thus, the facts emerged from this

study confirm the general picture about this matter. As far as the aspect of informal interaction is concerned, the answers given by students need better examination. More specifically, 41% of them answered neutrally, which can imply that their view concerning L1 use in such cases is neither essential nor pointless. However, when looking at this issue more deeply, L1 was the dominant means of communication for socializing purposes during the sessions by both teachers and learners. Wang and Hyun (2009) in their attempt to investigate the benefits and aims of L1 use, they discovered that students use L1 not only for class activities, such as producing sentences and learning vocabulary, but also for their private discussions during the class time. Tzagari and Diakou (2015) also proved that L1 was the preferable means of communication in instances of informal socialization. Thereby, it is evident based on the current research and the literature that L1 is highly used for socialization, but learners tend to have a vague view towards it probably because it does not affect the learning process to a great extent.

## **5.2 Answering the research questions**

Taking both the quantitative and qualitative data into consideration, the answers to the research questions mostly correspond to the findings of the existing literature. In fact, the results of the present paper represent the contradictory conclusions drawn by numerous researchers. Overall, it could be suggested that EFL students seem to have quite vague perceptions on the educational significance of L1, which explains the great conflict among the researchers.

Nevertheless, through this study, we could examine in great detail the extent to which students think that L1 is essential in the learning process. From the above interpretation of findings, we can identify that students highly support the use of their mother tongue whenever they face difficulties in comprehension. In addition to this, they strongly believe that the use of L1 is absolutely necessary with reference to grammar and vocabulary explanation. Furthermore, the outcomes of the classroom observations in relation to the literature data indicated that learners feel more secure and relaxed when their L1 is used, especially in cases of informal conversations, despite the statistical analysis which recorded a neutral attitude towards it. As already explained, learners might feel uncertain about its educational value in such cases and thus, they responded neutrally. This is the reason why more than one research instrument should be used when conducting a study in order to augment the validity and reliability of data interpretation (Zohrabi, 2013). However, they are doubtful about the use of L1 for the purposes of reading and writing explanation and they do not perceive its use as notably important when their teachers give instructions for tasks or tests. In fact, as regards the latter case, they disagree with its use.

The current research also revealed some particular stances that students have towards L1 use by their instructors. As stated earlier, the survey participants expect their teachers to use the L2 in the classroom as a means to help them develop better communication skills. They also think that their instructors make use of the L2 more frequently than the L1. In contrast, they are against the total exclusion of L1 by their teachers, mainly for misapprehension purposes. Learners also see a great place of L1 during the teaching of new vocabulary and grammar, thus significant educational value should be rendered to their mother tongue by their instructors in relation to these two practices. Moreover, students appear to feel unaffected whether their teachers choose the L1 or not in order to assess their knowledge, or in cases of writing and reading explanation. They do stress though the importance of L1 as a disciplinary method whenever teachers need to control their behavior.

Last but not least, a few more conclusions can be drawn through this study in relation to students' perceptions on L1 and their linguistic competence. To be more specific, as Prodromou suggested (2002), learners' competency level plays a vital role in the use of L1. This was the case in the higher linguistic stages of this research as well; through the observations, it could be seen that the sole reason for learners' shifting to L1 was due to their inhibition to use L2. However, they were fully capable of using their L2 skills and teachers were hesitant to use L1 in the higher levels, as also seen in the study of Tsigari and Diakou (2015). On the contrary, in the lower levels, especially in B1 classes, instructors were rather unwilling to increase the amount of L2; they placed great emphasis on grammar and vocabulary explanation and they used the L1 at a great extent so as not to impede the learning process. This phenomenon was in accordance with Giannikas' study (2011), in which teachers were identified to mostly follow traditional teaching styles when coping with younger EFL students. In addition, the teaching practices differed with reference to learners' competency, an issue which was also investigated by Tsigari and Diakou (2015). Instructors were more encouraging to learners of higher levels to make use of L2 instead of those to lower levels, because they did not want to risk any matters of incomprehension. Nonetheless, the present study found that elder students mostly hold a neutral perception regarding the value of their mother tongue, in contradiction to Tsigari and Diakou's study (2015).

### **5.3 Practical contribution of the study**

As seen in the literature, there are very few researchers who have investigated students' beliefs about the use of L1 in the private language school sector. The findings of the present research have provided worthwhile information on the topic as regards the private language school

context. In effect, the results demonstrated the extent to which EFL learners perceive their mother tongue as educationally valuable and the specific instances when they find it extremely useful. Most importantly, this paper contributes to bridging the gap found in the literature concerning the lack of evidence around the overwhelming field of language schools.

Besides the academic contribution, instructors could also gain great benefit. In the attempt to investigate learners' stances in relation to their L1 use in the EFL classroom, teachers could be led to raising higher awareness about their students' needs. Previous evidence has shown that teachers in frontistiria are likely to fully control communication and to revert to learners' L1 very often (Tzagari, 2009; 2012; 2014). In the present paper, this was mainly noticed in cases when students faced difficulties in comprehension, as well as when they extremely hesitated to use L2; thus, the results are more relatable to those of Tzagari and Georgiou's study (2016), in which they traced patterns of L1 use as a helpful resource in order to eliminate any probable difficulties. Viewing the outcomes of this research, instructors should take into serious consideration their learners' responses so that they could apply the right balance of L1 and TL use in their teaching practices. For instance, the outcome of the study has provided valuable insights concerning the attitudes by EFL teachers that facilitate the L2 development and others which are viewed as redundant by learners. Undoubtedly, this depends on teachers' critical thinking and priorities, but it could be argued that instructors can make such decisions that might help students in the learning process. As Edstom asserts (2006), while the use of L2 should be increased, yet L1 use at certain extent is teachers' moral obligation towards their students, especially when they feel confused and unable to communicate in L2. Finally, it could be suggested that after examining the results of the current research, the owners of the specific language school might take into account students' standpoints as regards the L1 use by their instructors, and possibly make adjustments to the teaching sessions and to the guidelines given to teachers so that the teaching procedure would be based specifically on the learners' needs.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

Certain limitations regarding the present study should be born in mind. To begin with, the findings have emerged from respondents' perceptions and beliefs who attend private English lessons additionally to those taught at school. As a result, it is impossible for any curricular changes to be applied; the only plausible changes are those centered around the selected teaching material or the teaching practices followed by instructors working in the private field. A second aspect of concern that may decrease the strength of these results relates to the representativeness

of the sample. The participants constituted a restricted amount of learners and most importantly, they were selected from only one research site, namely one language school. As a consequence, it could be argued that the findings do not provide us with a general picture of the private language school sector. In addition, the data mostly originated from self-questionnaires in an anonymous, survey format. Thus, the questionnaires did not collect information about personality traits or learning styles, which could further inform us about the specific strengths and weaknesses of learners. Furthermore, with regard to the questionnaire, there are no reliable ways to ensure the honesty of the participants or their complete understanding of the survey items. Last but not least, even though classroom observations were utilized to render validity, personal interviews with the teachers would have provided us with much more evidence concerning the use of L1. For example, they could explain the occasions, as well as the reasons why they use it from their point of view and compare all the data to form a broader view. However, this was not possible due to practical constraints and limited availability of time. On the whole, as a means to develop an adequate research model that would be seriously taken into consideration by policy makers, a study that would focus on greater numbers of participants from more language learning situations and would include the instructors’ opinions is needed.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to contribute to the demands of the literature to further investigate the educational value of L1 use in the EFL private language context in Greece. More specifically, this research aimed at exploring the attitudes and stances of students with reference to the use of L1 in the EFL classroom within the premises of a private language school. The sample of the participants was based on both the purposive and random technique. In particular, the respondents were randomly chosen but their participation was defined by their level of linguistic competence, namely B1–C2 levels. The main goal was to examine the standpoints of learners who were relatively independent users of English. Data were collected from student self-administered questionnaires and four classroom observations corresponding to each level. The survey items were inspired by the study of Tsagari and Diakou (2015), since the adjustment of pre-existing questions leads to greater reliability, as they have already been tested (Hyman et al., 2006). Similarly, the outcomes of their study were very frequently juxtaposed in correlation with the findings of the current study so as to augment the effect of validity, which is achieved through the comparison of results of other relevant data or theories (Middleton, 2020).

The findings of this research demonstrated that L1 use is seen to have a place in the learning process, similarly to Vasiliou’s (2010) and Tsagari and Diakou’s (2015) studies. Notably, students mainly believe that L1 serves some important functions, mostly for grammar and vocabulary purposes. It is also indicated through the utilization of classroom observations that L1 is extremely beneficial in cases of L2 anxiety, as well as of informal interactions between students and teachers, a factor that makes them feel more relaxed in the classroom. Nevertheless, the research outcomes also proved that further use of L2 is essential for the development of communication skills. The study also pinpoints the necessity to acquire a more critical approach towards the use of L1 and L2, especially by instructors. As stated by Macaro (2001), educators are responsible for identifying effective pedagogical principles that support and acknowledge the classroom as a multilingual context. To accomplish this, teachers must be more aware of their students' needs in the EFL context and manage to find the appropriate balance between L1 and L2 usage. Furthermore, according to the results of this study, EFL teachers especially those working in the language schools field need solid guidelines concerning the use of L1 that would inform them about which code-switching behaviors facilitate the L2 development and which undermine it in the future (Levine, 2003).

However, it is also prominent that further research be conducted that would take into account teachers’ points of view apart from student survey and observations that might provide more insight into the subject. In addition, the number of participants being examined was limited and the observations took place in only one research site. Thereby, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized in order to give us a holistic view as regards the attitudes of the majority of EFL students towards the use of L1 in ‘frontistiria’. We cannot disregard though the fact that the particular research has managed to bridge the gap found in the literature with reference to students’ beliefs in the private language school area and it has paved the way for future studies aiming at investigating the use of L1 in this educational environment.

All things considered, the current study nearly confirmed all the existing data found in the literature, which leads to the assumption that the use of L1 is a tremendously conflicting matter not only for researchers, but also for students. It has also proved that further investigation should be carried out in the private language classrooms as stated by many researchers (Tzagari & Georgiou, 2016; Tzagari & Giannikas, 2017), since we cannot draw absolute clear conclusions about learners’ stances and perceptions on L1 use regarding the specific educational sector.

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## Appendix I: “Student Survey”

### Student Survey

The purpose of this survey is to better understand your opinions and preferences about the use of Greek language by your teacher during your English lessons. It is going to be a very quick and completely anonymous process. There are no right or wrong answers.

Thank you so much for your help!

#### \* Απαιτείται

##### Part I

Tick (✓) the appropriate box.

#### 1. Gender \*

*Επιλέξτε όλα όσα ισχύουν.*

Male

Female

#### 2. Age \*

*Επιλέξτε όλα όσα ισχύουν.*

13–15

16–18

#### 3. Class Level \*

*Επιλέξτε όλα όσα ισχύουν.*

B1

B2

C1

C2

#### 4. Years of learning English \*

*Επιλέξτε όλα όσα ισχύουν.*

5-6

7-8

Part II

Tick (✓) what is true for you.

5. If my teacher uses more English than Greek, it helps me communicate better in English. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

6. My teacher uses Greek more frequently than English. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

7. My teacher should not use Greek at all during the lessons. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

8. My teacher should use Greek if I cannot understand something. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

9. When my teacher uses Greek, I feel more relaxed and comfortable in class. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

10. My teacher should use Greek when explaining grammar. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

11. My teacher should use Greek when teaching new vocabulary. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

12. My teacher should use Greek when explaining reading and text comprehension. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree



13. My teacher should use Greek when explaining writing. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. My teacher should use Greek when giving instructions for activities, tests etc. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. My teacher should use Greek when checking students' comprehension. \*

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. My teacher should use Greek in cases of controlling students’ behavior. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

17. My teacher should use Greek when informally socialising or joking with students. \*

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

## Appendix II: “Classroom Observations”

For the purposes of this research 4 observations for each level took place due to time restrictions:

### NOTES FROM B1 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Number of students: 6 girls and 4 boys

Details: The session focused on speaking skills. The teacher showed them pictures and they had to explain orally what they saw. A high amount of L1 use was noticed from both the teacher and the learners. Students were asking a lot of questions about unknown words in Greek and they socialized with each other again in Greek. The teacher tried to make them feel more relaxed by using Greek idioms such as «Ό,τι βρέξει ας κατεβάσει!» in order to motivate them speak in English. The teacher also focused a lot on the translation of new words.

### NOTES FROM B2 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Number of students: 4 girls and 6 boys

Details: This session was about grammar and particularly the phenomenon of “inversion”. The teacher used mainly the L2. Students however, seemed very reluctant using it. The teacher encouraged them to speak in English by pretending she did not understand Greek. Students used very frequently the Greek question «Να κάνω μια ερώτηση; Πως είναι το....;». Again, the jokes made by the teacher were made in Greek, especially when they gave wrong answers in B2 exam practice tests like “such a nice weather”: «Και κάπως έτσι πεθαίνουν οι καθηγήτριες!» in order to stress the importance and to advise them not to rush whenever they had to complete the tasks.

### NOTES FROM C1 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Number of students: 5 girls and 3 boys

Details: The teacher explained the grammar rules of “reduced relative clauses” in Greek. She displayed a word file on the whiteboard with rules in Greek and examples in English. In fact, the learners wanted to be explained the grammar rules first in L1 and then proceed to the exercises; the teacher urged them a lot to speak in English, but they seemed hesitant even though they completely understood what she was saying in L2. When the students were asked to provide examples of their own, they started talking in Greek, the teacher interrupted them in order to speak in L2, but they frequently gave the response in Greek «Δεν ξέρω πώς να το

*εξηγήσω στα Αγγλικά*». So, the teacher helped them using the L1 as a last resort, because they appeared very uncomfortable using the L2 in front of the others.

### **NOTES FROM C2 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION**

Number of students: 5 girls and 5 boys

Details: The lesson centered around C2 exam practice tests checking. The teacher used almost exclusively the L2. Students also expressed themselves in L2, but in their private conversations or when they wanted to tell a joke, they shifted to L1. Again, students seemed hesitant at some points to communicate in L2 and gave responses in Greek such as «*Δεν μπορώ να το πω στα Αγγλικά*». However, they tried the most to speak in L2 compared to the rest of the linguistic levels. The instructor once again used L1 herself to motivate them in a funny and strict way at the same time («*Νυστάζουμε; Για να ξυπνήσουμε λίγο!*»).

## Appendix III: “Tables and Graphs from the Data Analysis”

### Student questionnaire–Part I

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	33	44.6%
	Female	41	55.4%
	Total	74	100.0%
<b>Age</b>	13-15	53	71.6%
	16-18	21	28.4%
	Total	74	100.0%
<b>Class Level</b>	B1	20	27.0%
	B2	21	28.4%
	C1	17	23.0%
	C2	16	21.6%
	Total	74	100.0%
<b>Years of learning L2</b>	5-6	13	17.6%
	7-8	61	82.4%
	Total	74	100.0%

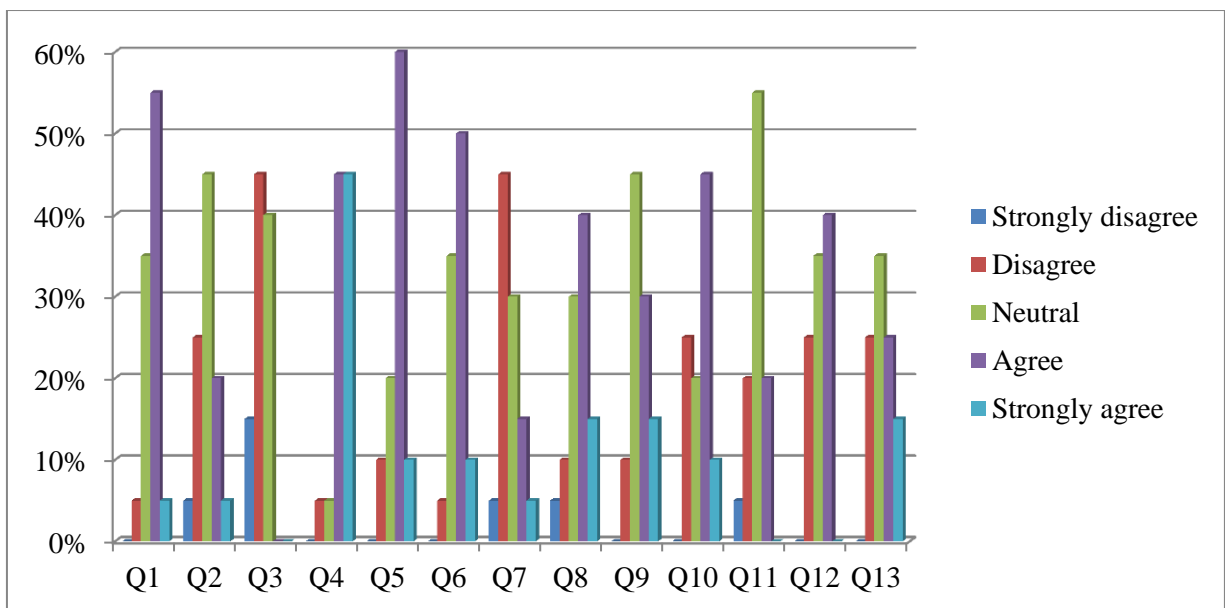
Table 1. Statistical Analysis of Participants.

**Student Questionnaire–Part II**

(see Appendix I for survey items)

<b>B1 Level</b>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
<b>Q1</b>	0%	5%	35%	55%	5%
<b>Q2</b>	5%	25%	45%	20%	5%
<b>Q3</b>	15%	45%	40%	0%	0%
<b>Q4</b>	0%	5%	5%	45%	45%
<b>Q5</b>	0%	10%	20%	60%	10%
<b>Q6</b>	0%	5%	35%	50%	10%
<b>Q7</b>	5%	45%	30%	15%	5%
<b>Q8</b>	5%	10%	30%	40%	15%
<b>Q9</b>	0%	10%	45%	30%	15%
<b>Q10</b>	0%	25%	20%	45%	10%
<b>Q11</b>	5%	20%	55%	20%	0%
<b>Q12</b>	0%	25%	35%	40%	0%
<b>Q13</b>	0%	25%	35%	25%	15%

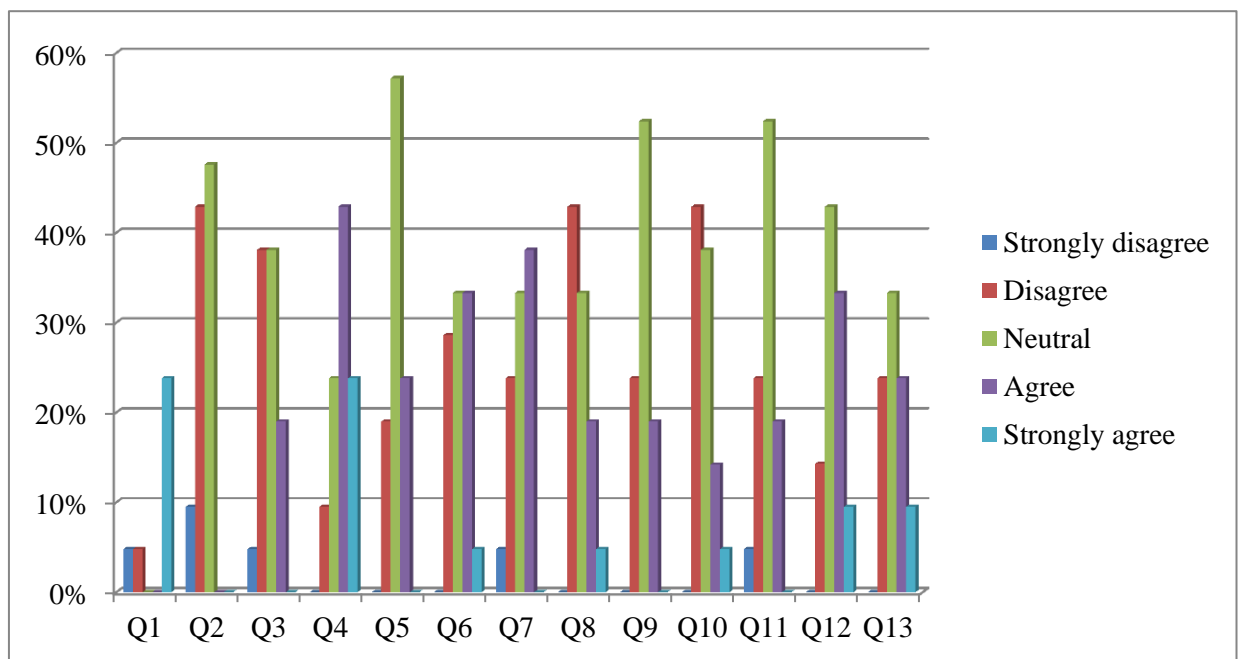
Table 2. B1 students’ perceptions on L1 use in foreign classrooms.



Graph 1. B1 answer values

B2 Level	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	4.8%	4.8%	19.0%	47.6%	23.8%
Q2	9.5%	42.9%	47.6%	0%	0%
Q3	4.8%	38.1%	38.1%	19.0%	0%
Q4	0%	9.5%	23.8%	42.9%	23.8%
Q5	0%	19%	57.2%	23.8%	0%
Q6	0%	28.6%	33.3%	33.3%	4.8%
Q7	4.8%	23.8%	33.3%	38.1%	0%
Q8	0%	42.9%	33.3%	19.0%	4.8%
Q9	0%	28.6%	52.4%	19.0%	0%
Q10	0%	42.9%	38.1%	14.2%	4.8%
Q11	4.8%	23.8%	52.4%	19.0%	0%
Q12	0%	14.3%	42.9%	33.3%	9.5%
Q13	0%	28.6%	33.3%	28.6%	9.5%

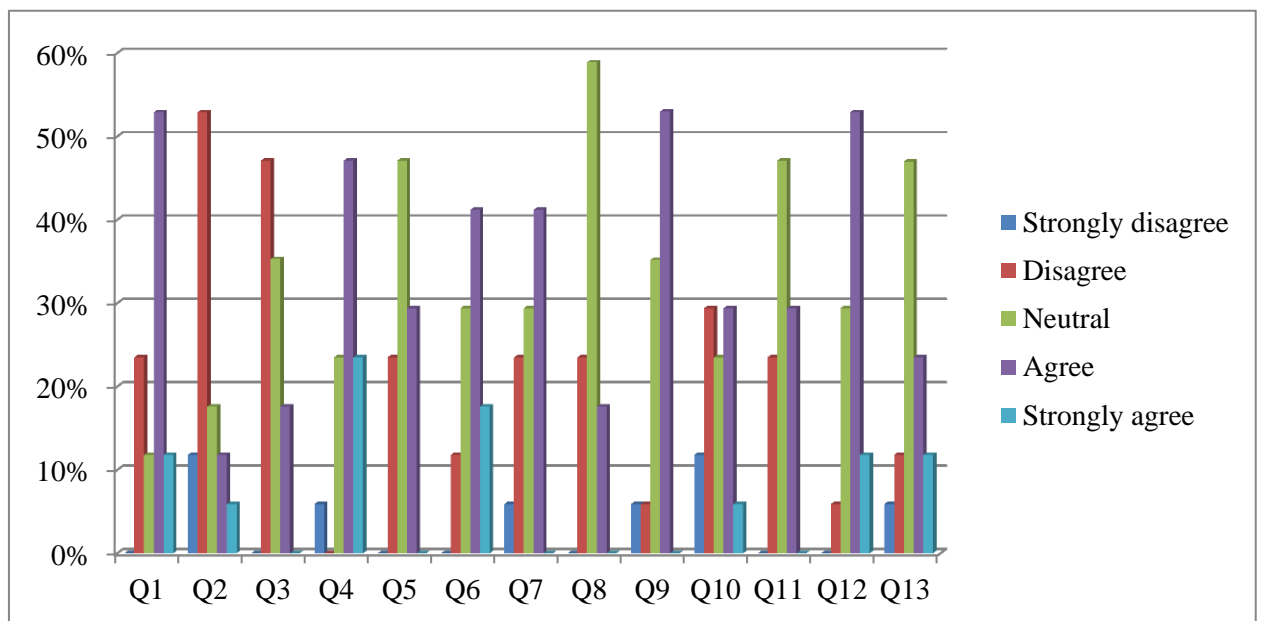
Table 3. B2 students' perceptions on L1 use in foreign classrooms.



Graph 2. B2 answer values

C1 Level	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	0%	23.5%	11.8%	52.9%	11.8%
Q2	11.8%	52.9%	17.6%	11.8%	5.9%
Q3	0%	47.1%	35.3%	17.6%	0%
Q4	5.9%	0%	23.5%	47.1%	23.5%
Q5	0%	23.5%	47.1%	29.4%	0%
Q6	0%	11.8%	29.4%	41.2%	17.6%
Q7	5.9%	23.5%	29.4%	41.2%	0%
Q8	0%	23.5%	58.9%	17.6%	0%
Q9	5.9%	5.9%	35.2%	53%	0%
Q10	11.8%	29.4%	23.5%	29.4%	5.9%
Q11	0%	23.5%	47.1%	29.4%	0%
Q12	0%	5.9%	29.4%	52.9%	11.8%
Q13	5.9%	11.8%	47.0%	23.5%	11.8%

Table 4. C1 students' perceptions on L1 use in foreign classrooms.

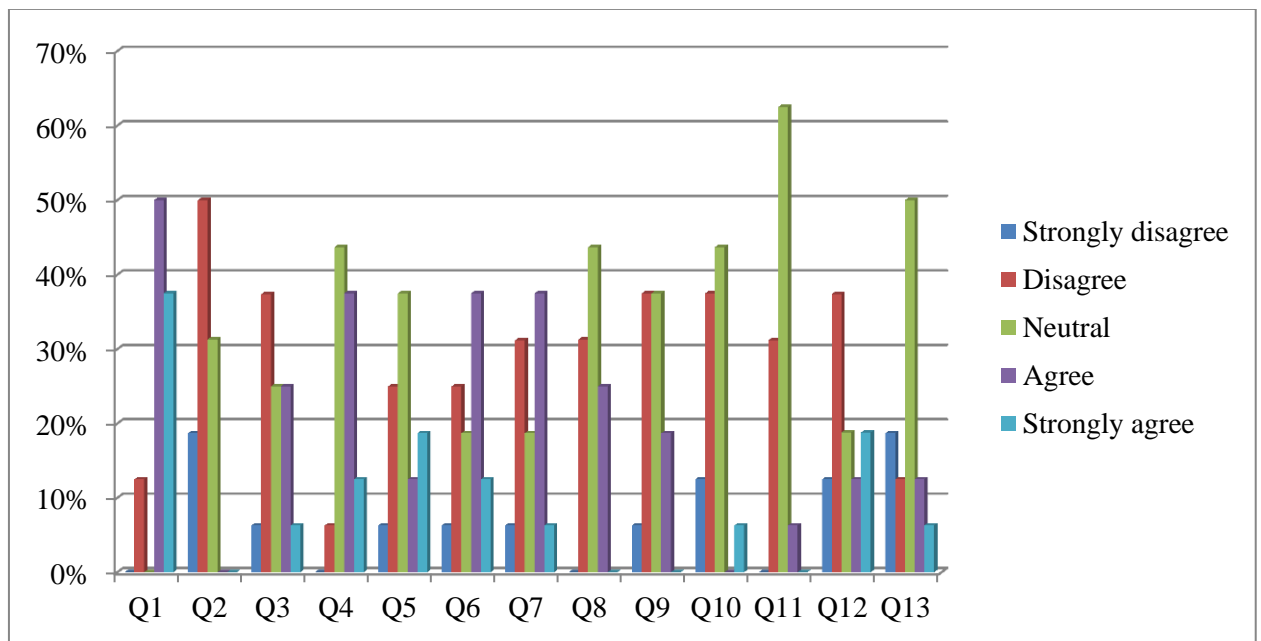


Graph 3. C1 answer values



C2 Level	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	0%	12.5%	0%	50.0%	37.5%
Q2	18.7%	50.0%	31.3%	0%	0%
Q3	6.3%	37.4%	25.0%	25.0%	6.3%
Q4	0%	6.3%	43.7%	37.5%	12.5%
Q5	6.3%	25.0%	37.5%	12.5%	18.7%
Q6	6.3%	25.0%	18.7%	37.5%	12.5%
Q7	6,3%	31.2%	18.7%	37.5%	6.3%
Q8	0%	31.3%	43.7%	25.0%	0%
Q9	6.3%	37.5%	37.5%	18.7%	0%
Q10	12.5%	37.5%	43.7%	0%	6.3%
Q11	0%	31.2%	62.5%	6.3%	0%
Q12	12.5%	37.4%	18.8%	12.5%	18.8%
Q13	18.7%	12.5%	50.0%	12.5%	6.3%

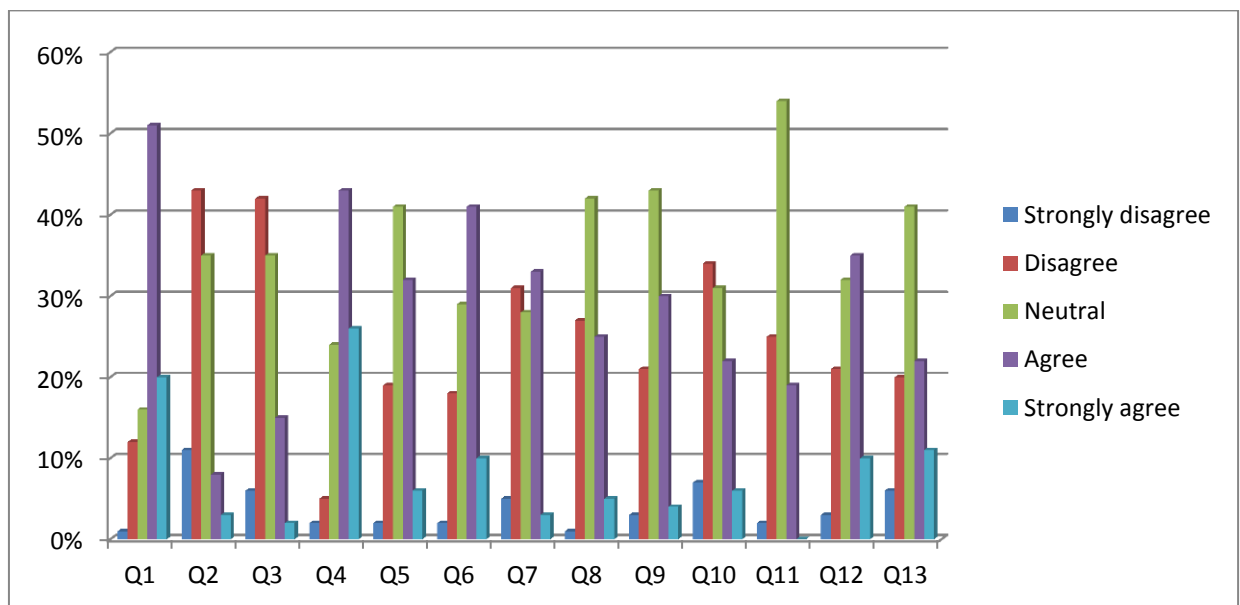
Table 5. C2 students’ perceptions on L1 use in foreign classrooms.



Graph 4. C2 answer values

All levels	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	1%	12%	16%	51%	20%
Q2	11%	43%	35%	8%	3%
Q3	6%	42%	35%	15%	2%
Q4	2%	5%	24%	43%	26%
Q5	2%	19%	41%	32%	6%
Q6	2%	18%	29%	41%	10%
Q7	5%	31%	28%	33%	3%
Q8	1%	27%	42%	25%	5%
Q9	3%	21%	43%	30%	4%
Q10	7%	34%	31%	22%	6%
Q11	2%	25%	54%	19%	0%
Q12	3%	21%	32%	35%	10%
Q13	6%	20%	41%	22%	11%

Table 6. Students’ general perceptions on L1 use in foreign classrooms.



Graph 5. All students answer values

Author’s Statement:

I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.