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An investigation on the utilization of Kurdish as the first language (L1) in English as a foreign language (L2) classes: A case study at the University of Human Development in non-English departments **

Summary

This paper aims to examine the use and functions of Kurdish (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes within a Kurdish educational context. Languages function differently across varied contexts, and prior studies have highlighted several reasons for using L1 in EFL classrooms by both students and teachers. Similarly, there are numerous reasons and functions for incorporating Kurdish in English language classes. This study specifically investigates the use and functions of Kurdish among Kurdish EFL university students and teachers at the University of Human Development in the non-English departments of IT and Computer Science, located in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The researcher employed two distinct questionnaires for EFL students and teachers and analyzed the data using SPSS. The study involved twenty university-level English language teachers and ninety Kurdish EFL students, randomly selected from the student population. The findings indicate that most Kurdish EFL students held positive views regarding the use of Kurdish in English classes for purposes such as explanations, instructions, skill development, exam preparation, and motivation. Conversely, most Kurdish EFL teachers preferred to use Kurdish infrequently or occasionally, believing that Kurdish should generally not be used in most teaching and learning situations. However, they did acknowledge the benefits

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of using Kurdish to address unusual behavior and occasionally to boost students' confidence and motivation.

Keywords: using L1, L2 in EFL classes, Kurdish EFL teachers, English language, Kurdish language

Introduction

English is a prominent global language that is extensively utilized for educational and academic purposes (Graddol, 2006). Numerous countries have deemed English as a necessary subject in schools to enhance learners' communication skills (Tanrıseven & Kırkgöz, 2021). English is utilized as both a foreign and second language in various contexts. Incorporating learners' native language in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings can yield advantages in the learning environment and facilitate the acquisition of English (Brooks-Lewis, 2009). The utilization of the learner's primary language (L1) in the instruction of EFL has been a topic of discussion. In the past, L1 was frequently employed in foreign language teaching (FLT), but a more refined approach is emerging based on research that both supports and challenges L1 implementation (Graddol, 2006). Studies suggest that the use of the mother tongue (MT) varies across different English language teaching (ELT) contexts worldwide (Tanrıseven & Kırkgöz, 2021). Previous research has explored the perspectives of students in Kurdistan (Hussein & Zeebaree, 2020), but the viewpoints and attitudes of both private university students and instructors remain unknown. Hence, this study investigates the perspectives and attitudes towards the English language curriculum, as well as the use of the L1 at the institutional level. This research focuses on the experiences of private university students in Iraq, specifically within the transitional program at the University of Human Development. This program is designed to enhance students' skills for higher education and future careers and is staffed by qualified educators who expect learners to possess a comprehensive understanding of English. Students are required to dedicate a minimum of 10 hours per week to English studies during their first year and are exposed to various teaching methodologies to facilitate language acquisition.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the perspectives and attitudes of both students and instructors towards the English curriculum and the use of the L1. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are Kurdish EFL teachers' perspectives towards using the Kurdish language in EFL classes?
2. What are the Kurdish EFL university students' perspectives towards using the Kurdish language in EFL classes?
3. What are the main functions of using Kurdish in English language teaching and learning in a Kurdish EFL setting?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic.

Literature review

The primary objective of initial ELT programs is to introduce students to the various aspects of teaching and learning English as a foreign or second language in different settings worldwide. Over time, there have been developments in terms of the utilization of learners' native language (L1) and the instructional approaches employed by teachers in this field. Instructors of foreign languages (FL) must make decisions regarding the incorporation of the L1 during EFL session, considering whether it may impede the acquisition of the target language (TL). Research both supports and challenges the use of the L1 in EFL teaching across different settings, considering the needs, requirements, age groups, and other aspects of EFL classes in Kurdish EFL and other contexts. Formerly, it was common to use both languages in the classroom. However, as further research examines the pros and cons of using the first language (L1) in EFL sessions, a more nuanced approach to teaching foreign languages (TFL) has emerged. The question of whether to use the L1 in second language (L2) classrooms has long been a topic of debate. Different models of L2 acquisition propose different assumptions about incorporating the L1 in L2 courses. Cemiloglu (2009) indicated both negative and positive aspects of separating and incorporating Kurdish and English in language classrooms.

Some scholars strongly oppose using both languages in language learning courses due to the rise of Communicative Language Teaching (Atkinson, 1987), while Nation (2003) argues that the L1 can effectively facilitate communication, though caution is advised against excessive reliance on the L1 (Nation, 2001). Advocates of monolingual methodologies argue that learning in both the L1 and L2 is similar and promote maximizing the use of the L2 while minimizing reliance on the L1, as interference from the L1 can hinder instruction in the L2 (Cook, 2001; Krashen, 1981). These studies show the importance of using L1 in promoting communication. However, the reliance on L1 to facilitate communication and conversation may hinder the goals and interests of English language learners.

Several studies have emphasized the significance of incorporating the Kurdish language into English language classes to enhance target language proficiency. For instance, Sofi-Karim (2015) has demonstrated that integrating Kurdish into English language instruction can enhance the proficiency of Kurdish EFL learners, offering various strategies to achieve this outcome. Similarly, Gunes and Zeydanlioğu (2014) have discovered that Kurdish instructors in Turkey perceive the inclusion of the Kurdish language as a supportive measure for English language learning, given the

cultural and linguistic similarities between Kurdish and English. However, Awla and Hamad (2023) have argued that linguistic differences between English and Kurdish may result in negative transfer and impede English language acquisition, particularly in relation to sentence structure, pronunciation, and terminology. Fadhil (2023), on the other hand, contends that using English as the primary language of instruction can better prepare EFL learners for academic and professional purposes.

Academic scholars in the field of language education, such as Nation (2003), Larsen-Freeman (2007), Ellis (1997), Krashen (1981), Cummins (2007), and Oxford (1999), argue against the complete exclusion of the first language (L1) in second language classrooms. They propose that the strategic and well-thought-out incorporation of the L1 can result in positive outcomes (Cook, 2001). It is important to consider the attitudes and perspectives of both instructors and students regarding the use of the L1. While research conducted internationally indicates that the utilization of the L1 in ELT varies depending on the context, there is a dearth of similar studies in non-English departments at private universities that face this challenge. This study aims to address this gap in the literature.

Debates about the usage of the first language in teaching EFL or English as a second language (ESL) classes can be categorized into two main perspectives: the monolingual approach, which discourages the use of L1, and the perspective that considers the use of L1 as valuable and pedagogical in L2 language classes. The monolingual stance argues against using the L1 in L2 language instruction, believing that using the L1 could hinder progress and limit engagement with the L2. As a result, instructors and learners in ESL/EFL settings are discouraged from using their native language in classroom tasks. Phillipson (1992) criticizes this view as the 'monolingual misconception,' suggesting that language acquisition is most effective in a monolingual environment. Conversely, supporters of L1 use argue that it can serve as a valuable tool to facilitate linguistic, cognitive, and affective aspects of L2 learning (Atkinson, 1987; Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins, 2007; Macaro, 2002; Nation, 2003; Phillipson, 1992). The use of L1 can assist learners in comprehending complex concepts or vocabulary in ESL/EFL, thereby saving time (Graham & Santos (2015). However, advocates advise caution and emphasize the importance of maximizing L2 usage (Butzkamm 2009; Macaro, 2002). This stands in contrast to the monolingual approach, which advocates for instruction solely in English. The prevailing consensus suggests that strategic incorporation of L1 can enhance second language acquisition.

The use of the first language (L1) in second language (L2) classes in diverse educational settings has sparked debates among scholars. Historically, bilingual teaching methods, which involve the use of L1 for studying L2 languages like Greek and Latin, have been predominant through translation-based approaches.

The reasons for incorporating L1 in L2 classrooms vary depending on the educational environment and the nature of teaching and learning. While opinions on the effectiveness of using L1 in English language instruction differ, scholars like Krashen (1981) have argued against its use, advocating for a focus on the target language. In contrast, Phillipson (1992) suggests that instructors often promote monolingual environments due to classroom exposure. The source and target languages are significant in terms of expanding educational and career opportunities for students (2023). In Iran, Dastgahian and Rostami (2013) evaluated the use of the Kurdish language in bilingual classes and demonstrated the advantages of using Kurdish in English classes at the university level. Research studies indicate that increased immigration has accelerated the incorporation of the target language (L1) in ESL classes, impacting teaching methodologies (de Jong, 2020). Schweers (1999) notes that both students and instructors widely support the use of L1 in English classes due to its pedagogical advantages. Additionally, Carless (2002), James (2013), and Cook (2001) affirm the practicality of incorporating L1 in foreign and second language classes. Shi (2007) discovered that learners and teachers in China perceive the judicious use of L1 in English language instruction positively as it helps maintain learner comfort and engagement. However, contrasting attitudes towards the use of L1 are reflected in studies conducted by Nazary (2008) among Iranian students and Yıldız and Yeşilyurt (2017) in the Turkish context, highlighting the influence of specific settings. Furthermore, Al-Nofaie (2010) found that Saudi students and instructors expressed favorable views towards integrating Arabic in EFL classes, particularly among beginners. Similarly, Al-Ta'ani (2019) emphasizes the significance of incorporating Arabic into EFL classrooms to address complex topics and enhance student engagement.

Anh (2012) studied Vietnamese university educators who unanimously supported the judicious use of the first language (L1). Atkinson (1987) and Hidayati (2012) emphasized the role of L1 in conveying receptive skills and language components among Bahasa learners in Indonesia. Yavuz (2012) highlighted the importance of balancing the use of L1 in language classes. Izumitani and Rintaro (2016), Pan and Pan (2010), Sundari and Febriyanti (2021), and Li (2018) researched the advantages of using L1 in EFL classes, such as improved comprehension and increased learner comfort. Larasati, Prihatin and Sumartono (2022) found positive attitudes towards using native languages in EFL contexts among Indonesian high school students, contradicting previous findings and emphasizing the need for further investigation in Kurdish EFL settings, as demonstrated by Hussein & Zeebaree (2020) and Ghafar and Mohamedamin (2023). Incorporating students' L1 in EFL classrooms can benefit both students and instructors by boosting confidence and fostering a stronger student-teacher connection. Khoja and Mohapatra (2017), Sulaiman (2022) and

Yilmaz (2016) highlighted the advantages of using the Kurdish language in English language classes and provided integration recommendations. However, recent studies have identified drawbacks, such as hindering English language acquisition (Ali, Ahmed, & Kottaparamban, 2023) and negative perspectives from Kurdish parents (Ali et al, 2023). Cemiloglu (2009) also outlined the challenges associated with using Kurdish in university departments that teach subjects in English. Therefore, it is crucial to examine students' perceptions of using their L1 in EFL classes to gather valuable insights and guidance for optimizing students' English proficiency.

The use and implications of the first language (L1) in second language acquisition (SLA) have been extensively studied (Andreou & Galantomos, 2009; Griffiths, 2004; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Van de Craats, 2002). Although attitudes towards L1 use have become less negative in recent times, the prevailing approach in L2 teaching still advocates for minimal L1 usage (Cummins, 2007). Researchers have pointed out that teachers encounter difficulties in incorporating the L1 (Kurdish) into English classes Mohammad (2009), and Kurdish EFL learners may face challenges with code-switching (Sadiq and Dilveen. 2022). Most methodologies assume that L2 instruction should predominantly rely on the L2, with L1 usage minimized (Fries, 1945; Cook, 2001; Phillipson, 2000). Nonetheless, the use of L1 in L2 teaching and learning continues to be a contentious matter (Alyami & Mohsen, 2019; Balabakgil & Mede, 2016; Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Yavuz, 2012). Some argue that L1 usage is still necessary to facilitate language learning and teaching (Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 2008; Macaro, 2009), while policies favor English-only instruction, underscoring the need for further examination by curriculum designers and authorities.

The use of the first language (L1) in language teaching has been a topic of debate. In the past, the Grammar-Translation method heavily relied on L1 use and translation techniques, which were widespread and acceptable (Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Hashemi & Sabet, 2013; Yavuz, 2012). However, the use of L1 was later criticized and avoided in methods like the Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, and Task-based Learning, as greater L2 use was believed to lead to better teaching and learning outcomes (Cook, 2008). Scholars have argued that English should be the primary medium of instruction in monolingual settings (Auerbach, 1993; Krashen, 1981), and the Berlitz Direct Method requires instructors to use the L2 exclusively in language classes (Al Hariri, 2015; Sharma, 2006). Krashen's (1981) theory of second language acquisition suggests that L2 learning should resemble the process of acquiring the native language, which involves minimizing L1 use (Cheng, 2023). Despite the emphasis on L2-only policies, some researchers have acknowledged the potential advantages of L1 use, such as the sociolinguistic and cognitive benefits it can offer learners (Timor, 2012).

Studies conducted in the Kurdish EFL context have shown positive attitudes towards L1 use, particularly in grammar and vocabulary instruction (Hussein & Zeebaree, 2020; Latif, 2021). However, limited research has explored the use of L1 among Kurdish EFL undergraduate learners in non-English language departments. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the use of Kurdish as the first language in this context.

Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed to address the research inquiries. In this study, one of the methods was a survey using two sets of questionnaires to obtain data from teachers and students regarding the utilization of the Kurdish language (L1) in English language classes. Questionnaires were effective for data collection in this study (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009), capturing the realities, perspectives, and attitudes of the participants.

Face validity is a critical aspect of any survey, as it evaluates the extent to which a questionnaire effectively measures its intended construct (Creswell, 1999). To ensure face validity, the questionnaires were reviewed by experts in English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics. The items were adapted from previously validated studies conducted by Schweers (1999), and as well as from relevant literature by Anh (2012), Qadri (2006), El-Dakhs et al. (2018), Taşkın (2011), and Thompson & Harrison (2014). The reliability of the survey was determined using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a score of 0.80, which indicates a high level of internal reliability.

The teachers' questionnaire focused on instructional techniques, teaching styles, and the use of L1 Kurdish in the classroom. It comprised 22 items and was specifically designed for Kurdish EFL teachers associated with non-English departments at the university level. The second questionnaire consisted of 36 items and was specifically designed for first-year students enrolled in two different departments. The response choices ranged from "never" to "always," providing a comprehensive range of options. To ensure both reliability and clarity, the students' questionnaires was meticulously translated from English to Kurdish, as the students belonged to non-English departments. The questionnaires for teachers and students were conveniently distributed online in April 2023 using Google Forms. Detailed instructions were provided in both Kurdish and English to ensure optimal understanding and participation.

The data obtained from the questionnaires was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Google Forms was used for data collection, while SPSS software was used for analysis. The selection of SPSS software was based on

recommendations from Griffith (2009), who have endorsed its application in social science and education research. For the teachers' questionnaire, the socio-demographical data was subjected to statistical analysis and presented in tabular form. The section addressing the teachers' attitudes towards the use of L1 was also analyzed using SPSS. Similarly, the students' questionnaire, which consisted of 36 items aimed at capturing their perspectives, underwent a similar analytical procedure. The objective of this analysis was to determine the frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations associated with each item in the respective questionnaires.

This study examines the use of Kurdish in English language classes within a Kurdish EFL context. It specifically targets first-year undergraduate learners at the University of Human Development who study English as a foreign language in non-English departments, such as IT and Computer Science. The study also focuses on instructors with experience teaching English in these non-English departments. The participants included 20 Kurdish EFL teachers from various university departments, each with 3–5 years of experience teaching English within non-English departments. Additionally, the study involved 90 first-year Kurdish EFL students enrolled in courses such as "Listening and Speaking," "Reading and Writing," and "English for Science and Technology." These students were randomly selected to ensure equal gender representation and were drawn from both the IT and Computer Science departments, totaling over 40 participants per department. The demographic of English language teachers was different since they were from different departments and colleges at the universities and had experiences with first year students. The students were all from College of Science, departments of IT and Computer Sciences. The gender of students was not considered since the number of males and females was not equal. The sample of participants was taken randomly.

Results

The results of this study were organized based on the data collected from demographic data and data analysis from the two questionnaires for students and teachers. Table 1 provides data on the profile of Kurdish EFL university teachers. Table 2 shows the perspectives of Kurdish EFL university teachers. Tables 3, 4 and 5 present the results on the perspectives of Kurdish EFL students.

Study participants

Table 1 shows the demographic of Kurdish EFL university teachers. The classification is divided into gender, years of teaching experiences and academic positions at the university level. The participants were teachers at the university level. There

were nine male teachers (M) and eleven female teachers (F) in total. Additionally, this table presents the distribution of participants' years of teaching experience (YTE) in the context of EFL. It reveals that six participants possess a teaching experience ranging from one to four years, while two participants have accumulated five to ten years of experience. Additionally, three participants exhibit a teaching background exceeding ten years.

These findings suggest that 90 percent of Kurdish EFL teachers possess considerable expertise in the field, thereby highlighting their extensive exposure to EFL classrooms. Finally, it presents the diverse academic designations of the participants, including ten individuals who hold master's degrees and serve as assistant lecturers (AL), nine who are lecturers (L), and one who is an assistant professor (A Prof.). This distribution of academic ranks strongly suggests that the participants possess a high level of competence in the field of English instruction.

Table 1. Study participants – Kurdish EFL university teachers

Gender	Value	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
M	0	9	45.0	45.0	45.0
F	1	11	55.0	55.0	55.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	100.0
Years of teaching experience (YTE)					
1–4 YTE	1	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
5–10 YTE	2	8	40.0	40.0	40.0
>10 YTE	3	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	100.0
Academic degree holders					
AL	1	10	50.0	50.0	50.0
L	2	9	45.0	45.0	45.0
A Prof.	3	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

Perspectives of Kurdish EFL university teachers

As delineated in table 2, the individuals were engaged in teaching the English language in non-English departments at the tertiary level, predominantly catering

to first and second-year students. The modal and median responses unveiled those teachers opted "never" or "occasionally" and "sometimes" options for 20 items, thereby suggesting that both instructors and learners did not employ L1 (Kurdish) during L2 (English) instruction such as using Kurdish for learning English, comprehension, explanation new words, methods of learning, topics in English, giving feedback, translating, brainstorming and, without it attaining dominance. For items 14 and 21, teachers also indicated "often," implying that incorporating Kurdish can be beneficial in giving the feeling of confidence and warning in EFL classes.

Table 2. Perspectives of Kurdish EFL university teachers towards using L1 (Kurdish language) in L2 (English language) classes – Items 1–22

Items	N	Missing	Mean	Mode	Std. dev	Variance
1. Teachers should use Kurdish in English classes.	20	0	1.65	1	1.182	1.397
2. Students should use Kurdish in English classes.	20	0	1.30	1	1.302	1.695
3. Kurdish aids teaching English effectively.	20	0	1.45	2	1.146	1.313
4. Kurdish helps students learn English.	20	0	2.10	2	1.294	1.674
5. Teachers should consider using more Kurdish in English classes.	20	0	1.65	2	1.182	1.397
6. Teachers should use L1 for explaining vocabulary.	20	0	2.10	2	.852	.726
7. Teachers should use L1 for new grammar structures.	20	0	1.55	1	1.099	1.208
8. Teachers should explain L1/L2 differences in L1.	20	0	2.40	2	1.231	1.516
9. Teachers should give instructions in L1 for tasks.	20	0	1.80	2	1.105	1.221
10. Teachers should use L1 for teaching comprehension.	20	0	1.50	0	1.433	2.053
11. Teachers explain methods of teaching in L1.	20	0	1.60	1	1.231	1.516
12. Teachers should clarify topics in L1.	20	0	2.15	2	.988	.976
13. Teachers should use L1 for assessments.	20	0	1.65	2	1.137	1.292
14. Using L1 boosts student confidence.	20	0	2.35	3	1.348	1.818
15. Teachers use L1 for effective learning.	20	0	1.80	1	1.281	1.642

Items	N	Missing	Mean	Mode	Std. dev	Variance
16. Teachers should provide feedback in L1.	20	0	1.55	1	1.191	1.418
17. Teachers should explain policies in L1.	20	0	1.95	2	.945	.892
18. Teachers should discuss tests in L1.	20	0	1.75	1	1.118	1.250
19. Teachers should use L1 for brainstorming.	20	0	1.55	0	1.432	2.050
20. Teachers should use translating to Kurdish in L1	20	0	2.20	2	1.105	1.221
21. Teachers use L1 for warning abnormal behavior.	20	0	2.10	3	1.373	1.884
22. L1 improves all skills.	20	0	1.85	2	1.226	1.503

Items 7 and 11 yielded comparable findings to items 1 and 2, thereby demonstrating that teachers employ L1 sporadically to elucidate grammatical structures and teaching methodologies. Likewise, items 8 and 9 produced similar outcomes, as most teachers opt for "sometimes" to clarify disparities between L1 and L2 and to provide instructions for classroom activities. Nevertheless, they selected "never" for Item 10, which signifies their abstention from utilizing L1 to explicate reading and listening activities. Concerning items 11 and 12, teachers favored "sometimes," indicating intermittent employment of L1 to clarify challenging vocabulary, examination regulations, or to evaluate students' performance. In terms of Item 14, teachers frequently resorted to L1, implying that Kurdish EFL learners feel assured when employing L1 in the classroom.

Items 15, 16, and 18 indicated that participants engage in occasional usage of their first language (L1) when giving instructions on English language learning, providing feedback, managing lessons, and discussing quizzes and assessments. Teachers hold the belief that English should take precedence over Kurdish when it comes to exam instructions, feedback, and learning commands. Furthermore, according to items 17 and 20, teachers expressed the opinion that L1 should be utilized on certain occasions for purposes such as communicating course policies, making announcements, translating texts or phrases, and assisting students in gaining a better understanding of English and its associated skills.

Regarding items 19 and 21, teachers did not typically employ the use of L1 for brainstorming activities in writing or speaking, but they do often utilize L1 to caution students about peculiar behavior. Overall, 60 percent of Kurdish EFL teachers indicated sporadic usage of L1 in English classes by selecting "sometimes" for eleven out of twenty-two items. Notably, items 10 and 19 elicited "never"

responses, signifying that teachers abstain from employing L1 for reading, listening, or brainstorming. Additionally, teachers opted for "occasionally" in response to seven items, indicating intermittent use of L1 in Kurdish EFL lessons. Items 14 and 21 stood out as the sole item where all teachers unanimously selected "often" which can be used for boosting students' confidence and warning on unusual behavior. For pedagogical activities, examinations, and language skills practice, teachers predominantly chose "rarely" or "sometimes," underscoring their preference for utilizing the target language in the teaching of English skills. In conclusion, teachers chose "never", "rarely" and "sometimes" for using Kurdish language for 20 items out 22 items which can be considered as 95 percent. This shows that these educators firmly believe that English should predominate in EFL instruction.

Perspectives of Kurdish EFL university students

Table 3 illustrates results from items 1 to 12 the preferences of a sample of ninety students majoring in non-English disciplines such as IT and Computer Science, regarding the usage of the Kurdish language (L1) by their English instructors. The data reveals a strong preference for frequent use of L 1 (Kurdish Language) in the classroom. Specifically, the 80 percent of participants chose "always" for 10 items, items 2, 4–12 which demonstrate the employment of L1 in various contexts, including explanations, guidance, speaking activities, vocabulary, tasks, and exams. Furthermore, 20 percent of participants chose "often" for two items, which include 1 and 3, indicating that the use of L1 is frequently deemed necessary within the classroom setting. It can be concluded that the participants chose "always" for 10 items out of 12 items, which strongly supports the use of Kurdish language in most classroom activities and procedures.

Table 3. Perspectives of Kurdish EFL university students towards using L1 (Kurdish) in L2 (English) classes – Items 1–12

Item	N	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. dev	Variance
1. Teachers are using the native language (L1).	90	0	3.4557	3.0000	3.00	1.22887	1.510
2. L1 is aiding English learning.	90	0	3.7667	4.0000	5.00	1.39863	1.956
3. There is a necessity of L1 in the classroom.	90	0	3.6222	3.5000	3.00	1.18585	1.406
4. L1 is used for explaining new vocabulary.	90	0	3.9778	5.0000	5.00	1.20838	1.460

Item	N	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. dev	Variance
5. L1 is used for clarifying grammatical points.	90	0	3.7222	4.0000	5.00	1.26338	1.596
6. Kurdish is used for illustrating L1 and L2.	90	0	3.7111	4.0000	5.00	1.25639	1.579
7. L1 is used for tasks, guidance, and assignments.	90	0	3.5444	3.0000	5.00	1.31680	1.734
8. L1 is effective for explanations and activities.	90	0	3.7667	4.0000	5.00	1.28124	1.642
9. L1 is useful for describing teaching methods.	90	0	3.5556	3.0000	5.00	1.31637	1.733
10. L1 is used for explaining expressions.	90	0	3.9444	4.0000	5.00	1.22117	1.491
11. L1 is used for recapitulating lectures.	90	0	3.6333	4.0000	5.00	1.32775	1.763
12. L1 is used for evaluating students.	90	0	3.5444	3.0000	5.00	1.35050	1.824

Table 4 illustrates that 85 percent of participants consistently selected the response option “always” for 9 items 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23. This signifies their preference for teachers to utilize the first language (L1) in order to facilitate comprehension of English, foster confidence, provide feedback, give instructions for exams, translate texts and words, respond to inquiries, explain new concepts, address personal matters, as well as for reading and writing activities. Furthermore, the response option “often” was chosen for items 14, 18, and 24, indicating that the use of L1 should be frequent when discussing listening and speaking activities, as well as during classroom discussions on various topics.

Table 5 illustrates that 90 percent students opted for the response option “always” for 9 items which include items 25–31. This indicates their desire for teachers to employ the use of the native language (L1) in tasks involving interactions with classmates, providing explanations, enhancing comprehension of grammar, engaging in listening and speaking activities, clarifying ambiguous points, motivating students, and aiding overall comprehension. Moreover, items 32 and 33 received a rating of “often,” implying that L1 also assists in spelling and comprehending the English language. In sum, the findings indicate a strong inclination among students to utilize L1 as a facilitator in the process of English language learning. These results, therefore, call for further deliberation on the role of both L1 and L2 in EFL classrooms.

Table 4. Perspectives of Kurdish EFL university students towards using L1 in L2 classes – Items 13–24

Item	N	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. dev	Variance
13. Kurdish enhances understanding and confidence.	90	0	3.6667	4.0000	5.00	1.26313	1.596
14. Kurdish feedback supports English learning.	90	0	3.9667	4.0000	5.00	1.19409	1.426
15. Using Kurdish is useful for managing classes and exams practically.	90	0	3.7667	4.0000	5.00	1.20905	1.462
16. Kurdish should be used for sharing activities and ideas.	90	0	3.4889	3.0000	3.00	1.29167	1.668
17. Kurdish translation aids comprehension.	90	0	3.7111	4.0000	5.00	1.22927	1.511
18. Kurdish should be used in speaking activities amongst individuals or groups.	90	0	3.4944	3.0000	3.00	1.32394	1.753
19. Kurdish should be used for expressing questions.	90	0	3.5667	3.0000	5.00	1.27244	1.619
20. Kurdish should be used for English translation and understanding.	90	0	3.8556	4.0000	5.00	1.19513	1.428
21. Kurdish should be used for discussing personal matters.	90	0	3.8667	4.0000	5.00	1.23798	1.533
22. Kurdish should be used for responding in English activities.	90	0	3.9222	4.5000	5.00	1.29153	1.668
23. Kurdish should be used for discussing various English topics.	90	0	3.1222	3.0000	5.00	1.49777	2.243
24. Teachers should often use L1 while sharing ideas on listening and speaking activities.	90	0	3.4333	3.0000	3.00	1.35787	1.844

Table 5. Perspectives of Kurdish EFL university students using L1 in L2 classes – Items 25–35

Item	N	Missing	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. dev	Variance
25. Kurdish should be used for quicker completion of tasks with friends.	90	0	3.4444	3.0000	5.00	1.43089	2.047
26. Kurdish should be used while seeking explanations in Kurdish from teachers or classmates.	90	0	3.6222	4.0000	5.00	1.32883	1.766
27. Kurdish aids in understanding grammatical aspects of English.	90	0	3.5111	3.0000	5.00	1.34285	1.803
28. Kurdish makes facilities for speaking activities and listening comprehension.	90	0	3.4333	3.0000	5.00	1.29866	1.687
29. Kurdish should be used for clarity in unclear lecture points.	90	0	3.9667	4.0000	5.00	1.18464	1.403
30. Students feel more connected to lectures by using Kurdish.	90	0	3.6667	4.0000	5.00	1.35746	1.843
31. Students restore to L1 while expressing challenging concepts in English.	90	0	3.6778	4.0000	5.00	1.37251	1.884
32. L1 should be used to enhance spelling comprehension.	90	0	3.1667	3.0000	3.00	1.12430	1.264
33. L1 facilitates better comprehension and understanding.	90	0	3.5778	3.0000	3.00	1.26294	1.595
34. L1 provides support and motivation for learning English.	90	0	3.6333	4.0000	5.00	1.34457	1.808
35. L1 facilitates difficult expressions in English lectures.	90	0	3.2889	3.0000	5.00	1.42407	2.028

The main functions of using Kurdish (L1) in English (L2)

Based on the findings of the study, there were notable disparities in the ways in which students and teachers articulated their thoughts. From the students' vantage point, most students in the departments of IT and Computer Science believed that incorporating the Kurdish language in the process of learning English as a foreign language had several advantages. 90 percent of students chose "always" and 10 percent "often" for most points, and they had strong preferences of using Kurdish language in English language classes. More specifically, the students perceived the use of Kurdish to facilitate the acquisition of challenging vocabulary and expressions, provide explanations on various topics, clarify instructions and examination requirements, elucidate grammar and vocabulary, as well as rectify spelling errors. Moreover, students regarded the Kurdish language as a tool to augment comprehension, motivation, connection, and confidence in each instructional session. The results in tables 3, 4, and 5 show that 90 percent of students prefer using Kurdish language in English language classes.

Conversely, Kurdish EFL teachers held a divergent standpoint. English language teachers from various colleges and departments at the university level had opposite views comparing to students' views on the use of Kurdish language in English language classes. As shown in table 2, 90 percent of teachers chose "never" or "rarely" or "sometimes" for most of the points. This shows that Kurdish EFL teachers were increasingly interested in using English language instead of Kurdish language for explanation, giving feedback, translating, exams, learning English, improving language skills, brainstorming and comprehension in English. 10 percent of teachers chose "often" for using Kurdish language for warning students on unusual behavior and boosting students' confidence in the classroom. Moreover, table 2 shows that teachers never or rarely used Kurdish language for most of the academic activities and classroom instructions. Particularly, they opined that employing the Kurdish language had a limited purpose, such as cautioning students regarding atypical behavior. Regarding other aspects, such as explanations, pedagogical skills, and the necessity of employing the Kurdish language in English classes, 90 percent of teachers chose "never", "rarely" and "sometimes" to utilize Kurdish language. This is in stark contrast to the perspective of students, who overwhelmingly favored the "always" and "often" option for most items. In conclusion, it can be inferred that Kurdish EFL teachers generally have a pessimistic or negative view regarding the utilization of the Kurdish language, whereas students predominantly hold a positive view in most instances.

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal varying opinions regarding the incorporation of the Kurdish Language (L1) in English language classes offered by non-English departments. Based on the responses of the students, it appears that the use of Kurdish by teachers is infrequent or occasional, with some teachers refraining from using it altogether. Conversely, Kurdish EFL teachers generally advocate for limited or no use of Kurdish, except in specific instances where it may facilitate comprehension and aid in explaining topics (Stark et al., 2024). Consequently, the majority of Kurdish EFL teachers only employ Kurdish when addressing uncommon behavior in the classroom. Nevertheless, students express a strong preference for a more consistent integration of the Kurdish language in their English language learning experiences. This preference does not entirely align with the teachers' perspectives on the use of the first language (L1) in EFL classes, which vary significantly. This disparity is not only observed in Kurdish EFL classrooms but also in studies conducted globally. For instance, Manara (2014) and Marcellino (2008) discovered that Indonesian EFL students value practical applications of English language skills, while Carless (2008) emphasized the benefits of using L1 for both comedic and instructional purposes.

Similarly, Kurdish EFL students have expressed that incorporating their first language (L1) is beneficial for reading activities and enhances their learning experience in English. This is in line with the findings of Macaro (2009), who suggest that using L1 simplifies the teaching and learning of vocabulary and reading tasks in foreign and second languages. However, Kurdish EFL teachers do not support the use of L1 in reading activities, despite the majority of Kurdish EFL students expressing positive sentiments towards its use in the classroom. Another study conducted by Galali and Cinkara (2017) indicated that Iraqi undergraduate learners have positive perceptions of using L1 to facilitate learning their second language (L2). Additionally, Kurdish EFL teachers also view frequent use of Kurdish as beneficial for their confidence and motivation in learning English, which is consistent with Carless (2008), who demonstrated that L1 is useful for maintaining learners' comfort and engagement. This can be advantageous as learners feel more comfortable and engaged in classroom activities. A similar outcome is supported by Iswati and Hadimulyono (2018), who suggest that using L1 fosters confidence and promotes learning and motivation in L2 classes. However, this result is not in line with Dastgahian and Rostami (2013) and Yu (2015), who confirmed that students' engagement and motivation can be increased when EFL classes are connected to the realities of world English and practical applications. Additionally, Li (2018)

demonstrated that L1 serves linguistic functions and offers valuable insights into learners' styles and teacher approaches. This point has been positively reflected by Kurdish EFL students, while Kurdish EFL teachers hold the opposite view. While Paker and Karaağaç (2015) noted the role of L1 in building rapport and explaining complex topics, the Kurdish EFL teachers in this study predominantly refrain from using Kurdish, possibly due to the dominance of English in EFL contexts, which could inadvertently demotivate students (Ghafar & Mohamedamin, 2023).

Moreover, Hidayati (2012) asserted that the use of the first language (L1) has a significant impact on the development of receptive skills and language components among Bahasa learners at the tertiary level in Indonesia. However, teaching language skills in the source language may impede the learning of the target language. Similar views have been expressed by Kurdish EFL teachers, although this perspective may vary depending on the instructional level. Regarding the instructional or core knowledge of the English language, teachers should strive to achieve a balance between utilizing L1 and L2, as excessive or insufficient use of either language may not be conducive to English language learning (Yavuz, 2012). Nevertheless, the findings suggest that Kurdish students increasingly prefer using the Kurdish language over English. This finding is in line with the argument put forth by Pan and Pan (2010), who advocate for limiting and prohibiting the use of L1 in the classroom. This viewpoint aligns with the perspectives of Kurdish EFL teachers. In contrast to Ellis's (1997) recommendation to minimize L1 use, Swain (1985) and Krashen (1981) emphasize the importance of L1 in language negotiation and scaffolding learning. Larsen-Freeman (2007) further supports the judicious use of L1, particularly in explaining challenging concepts, echoing the findings that the Kurdish language can facilitate the acquisition of a foreign language. In China and Saudi Arabia, researchers have reported positive attitudes among teachers and students towards using L1 in L2 classes (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Schweers, 1999; Van de Craats, 2002). Most studies indicate that the use of L1 has some degree of usefulness in L2 classes. These debates will serve as a foundation for further research and contributions on the use of L1 and L2 in different educational contexts. On the other hand, recent findings indicate that the use of English is more important than the use of the source language. Nguyen et al (2020) suggested that incorporating English language classes creates opportunities for mutual understanding and the exchange of cultural aspects, both locally and globally. Similarly, Choi (2024) argues that English plays a significant role in professional and academic environments. Therefore, it can be concluded that both languages, English and the source language, are important for EFL classes if there is a balanced usage of each language (Mekael & Muhammed, 2023).

Summary and conclusion

The presence of both the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) is crucial in all contexts. Previous research has examined various perspectives on the utilization of L1 and its significance, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) settings in diverse countries. The presented study concentrates on the Kurdish EFL setting at the University of Human Development. It is evident that many students exhibit positive attitudes towards incorporating L1 in non-English departments, whereas teachers in general do not endorse its use in L2 Kurdish EFL classes. Both students and teachers provide diverse reasons for their choices to employ or refrain from employing L1 in Kurdish EFL classes. Kurdish EFL teachers advocate for the limited utilization of the Kurdish language, suggesting that it should not be employed in all aspects of instruction. Conversely, Kurdish EFL students hold a favorable view of using their native language but concur that it should not be extensively employed in learning and teaching situations. Kurdish EFL learners consider Kurdish to be more advantageous than English. The majority of Kurdish EFL teachers prefer to confine the use of L1. The primary functions of the Kurdish language are to learn difficult words, expressions, explanations on various topics, understand exam tasks, give instructions, and caution against unusual behavior in the teaching and learning process. Future studies could be conducted in other public universities and different departments to broaden the research scope in this field.

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