

## The Use of the Mother Tongue in Chinese EFL Classrooms

### 英語課堂中使用母語之研究

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### Abstract

The issue of whether the learners' mother tongue should be used in the classroom has always been a subject of ongoing discussion by many researchers. This paper attempts to investigate the use of Chinese (L1) in English classes at a tertiary level. The main objectives were to examine the purposes of L1 use and the attitudes of Taiwanese technological students towards the use of Chinese in the EFL classrooms. The participants were 510 undergraduate students at China University of Science and Technology. Data were collected through a questionnaire with two types of multiple-choice questions—single response and multiple response. The results indicated that the use of Chinese was for defining new vocabulary words, explaining grammar rules, clarifying difficult concepts, and lastly checking for comprehension, and that a balanced and judicious use of L1 in the EFL classrooms by both teachers and students can be useful in the language learning process and may even be essential to increase learners' comprehension.

Key words: Chinese EFL classrooms, use of the mother tongue, attitudes

### 摘要

有關於學習者的母語是否應該在英語課堂中使用，一直是許多研究人員探討的議題。本研究目的旨在探究英語課堂中使用母語之用途，以及科大學生對於英語課堂上使用母語之態度。邀請中華科技大學共計510位同學參與本研究。透過問卷收集資料並進行統計分析。最後研究結果顯示，英語課堂上使用母語之用途分別為：定義新的詞彙、解釋語法規則、澄清困難的概念、以及了解學生的學習效果；英語教師於課堂中適度地使用母語，不僅有利於語言學習的過程，並可藉此

提高學習者對語言的理解，進而增進其學習成效。

關鍵詞: 英語課堂，使用母語，態度

## I. Introduction

The issue of including or excluding the learners' mother tongue or first language (L1) in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has been the subject of ongoing discussion and controversy for a long time. In truth, there have been various shifts to and from the utilization of L1 in the EFL classroom over the last few decades. This controversial issue is especially relevant in culturally homogenous environments such as Taiwan, where the majority of the students are monolingual and the teacher is usually a bilingual person who is a native Chinese speaker teaching English. For many years educators and professionals in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) have considered the monolingual approach or English-only approach in foreign language education as the correct and only appropriate way to teach EFL. Teaching methods have long guided this approach by banning learners from using their shared L1 in EFL classroom activities. Brooks and Donato (1994) note that teachers are sometimes reluctant to use group work because they feel that students will use their L1 in group situations. A main reason for this reluctance has been the widespread adoption of communicative approach to language teaching in which classroom activities are designed to maximize learners' use of the target language.

While there are those who embrace the idea expressing that the use of L1 in the EFL classroom should be reduced as much as possible and sometimes even prohibited, so that learners can be exposed to maximum target language input, yet this method of completely shunning L1 may be inefficient and out of step with a truly learner-centered environment. The long-established communicative pedagogy does not reflect the overwhelming reality that many EFL classes confront, such as the case in Japan, Korea, or Thailand where both teachers and students are sharing a common language and cultural heritage. Rather, it is based on an ESL (English as a second language) context, such as in the United States or Australia where classrooms are normally made up of multilingual groups of immigrant students who do not speak the teacher's L1 and vice versa, and where the teacher is lucky to speak one of his students' mother tongues. The "English Only" approach is actually more applicable to any ESL setting where English not only acts as the language of instruction, but also plays the role of lingua franca.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and methodology have always extolled the well-known “English Only” approach. According to the proponents of CLT, using mother tongue impedes L2 (English) acquisition. The very famous L1 interference, language transfer, and among others are held responsible for many of the students’ mistakes in the process of learning a foreign language. It seems that there is no merit of using L1 in class in the light of CLT. In other words, there is little (if any) a learner can gain from using mother tongue in the communicative language class. During the researcher’s academic training in the U.S. as an EFL teacher, she was specifically told not to use L1 in the classroom. She remembers taking the TESOL Practicum one semester where she was assigned to teach a group of low proficiency ESL adult learners. Much to her delight, the majority of these students came from Mainland China and spoke the same language as she did—Mandarin. Since she was instructed to avoid the “hampering” use of L1 in class, she did her best to employ as many techniques as possible in the classroom—getting meanings from contexts, paraphrasing, miming, gestures, paralinguistic features, etc. Admittedly there were times she found herself in some “bizarre” situations. As Cole (2012) describes, a teacher can often end up being a contortionist trying to explain the meaning of a language item where a simple translation would save time and anguish. 100% direct method can be especially frustrating; however, careful and limited use of the L1 can have a powerful, positive effect here. Atkinson (1993) suggests that for many learners, in particular adults and teenagers, occasional use of the L1 gives them the opportunity to show that they are intelligent, sophisticated people.

Now let’s briefly examine the EFL programs in some Asian countries. The Korean Education Ministries 7<sup>th</sup> curriculum stipulated the application of English only approach which came into force in 2000, so as to improve Korean students’ communicative abilities in the L2. In Japan, pressures on English teachers are also rising. Moriyama (2000) mentions that a prime minister’s commission on Japan’s future suggests that citizens should have a workable knowledge of English by the time they become adults. To achieve this goal, the Japanese Ministry of Education proposes English-medium instruction for subject courses in tertiary education. Here, in Taiwan, with government officials constantly hammering home the message about the importance of cultivating international perspectives and emphasizing the role of the English language in the modern world, there have been numerous talks held by the local tertiary institutions on the implementation of the English-only policy. As far as many educators understand,

some university high-ranking administrators believe that the teachers' over-reliance on the L1 in teaching English is one of the underlying reasons for students' low proficiency in English. That is to say, they are placing the blame for students' low English competence on native Chinese speaking teachers' use of Chinese in the classroom. It is this strong conviction that leads the administration to make such decisions that can be extreme without thinking about the pedagogical implications. Several factors need to be taken into account before the enforcement of such policy.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Little attention has been paid to the issue of using L1 in the context of the Chinese EFL classroom, particularly at the technological university level. This motivated the researchers to conduct further investigations to find out the views of Taiwanese students on the use of Chinese in EFL classrooms at a tertiary level. This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the students' expectations towards their English teachers?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards the use of Chinese in the EFL classroom?
3. For what purposes do students think it is appropriate for both teachers and learners to use Chinese in the EFL classroom?
4. To what extent do students think that the use of Chinese in the classroom is necessary?
5. Are there statistically significant differences in students' preference for English teachers among students at different years, colleges, and proficiency levels?

Through this study, it is hoped that teachers, both native and non-native speakers of English will have a better perspective on making their teaching yield more favorable results.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Historical Developments in ELT**

The grammar-translation method predominated in Europe until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

The primary objective was for students to learn how to read and write in the foreign language. This was mostly accomplished through memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary word lists, explicit presentation of grammar rules, translation of de-contextualized sentences, and, above all, a strong focus on accuracy. The students' L1 was used as the main form of instruction, which inevitably resulted in limited exposure to the target language (TL) in the classroom. Consequently, many students found themselves unable to use the TL successfully, regardless of how long they had studied it. Harmer (2001) stated that the use of L1 in the foreign language classroom started to be viewed as uncommunicative, boring, pointless and irrelevant. Brown (2000) also claimed that this method was challenged for doing "virtually nothing to enhance students' communication ability in the language".

As dissatisfaction towards the grammar-translation method grew and the demand for oral competence became more apparent, foreign language teaching (FLT) gradually shifted from the heavy dependence on the students' L1 for instruction, and moved towards the active use of the TL in the language classroom. The methods that followed, namely, the Direct Method and the Audio-lingual Method, effectively eliminated the students' L1 from the classroom, superseded by TL-only instruction. Advocates of the Direct Method and the Audio-lingual Method believed that the focus on TL not only could enhance communication, but activate both conscious and unconscious learning. They added that learners could understand the message even though they might not know the exact meanings of certain words or structures, which indicated that learners did not need to grasp all the words they read or heard. Subsequently, the total use of English to teach English as a foreign language was obligated. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, the use of L1 was still considered as undesirable. Today, many EFL teachers still have reservations concerning the use of L1 in class, objecting to it on the grounds that it limits exposure to the target language and keeps students thinking in their L1.

However, recent research findings have demonstrated that the learners' L1 has an important place in ELT. Nation (1978) maintains that exclusion of the mother tongue from the classroom would be directly parallel to saying that pictures or real objects should not be used in the L2 class. In fact, a relatively new teaching method which deliberately uses L1 in teaching EFL has emerged. It is the New Concurrent Method that requires teachers to balance the use of the L1 and the FL (Faltis, 1990). Students in monolingual classrooms often have common training in L1 which may benefit them in learning a new language. The L1 can be utilized as a tool to facilitate learning and

communication. Thus, teachers can exploit their students' previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2. This well-balanced approach, as Nation (2003) concludes, not only sees a role for the L1, but also recognizes the importance of maximizing L2 use in the classroom.

### **SLA and Mother Tongue Use**

The question of whether or not to allow, or even to promote, the use of the students' L1 in the language classroom remains a contentious issue. A number of studies have been conducted, which either support or oppose the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. The general assumption that has prevailed for some time is that English ought to be learned through English, not by the use of L1, which has to be completely banished from the classroom. The most vocal opponent of the mother tongue use in the classroom is Stephen Krashen (1981) and his 'comprehensive input' hypothesis. Comprehensive input is the quality and quantity of exposure of the target language that a learner receives. Since Krashen's theory is based on the importance of target language input for second language acquisition, any reduction of the TL would then be seen as a wasted opportunity for valuable input. Krashen & Terrell (1983) stress that learners acquire FL following the same path they acquire their L1; therefore, the use of L1 should be minimized.

Krashen is not alone in his call for 100% TL instruction. Chaudron (1988) also promotes a "rich TL environment". Ellis (1984) claims that more language acquisition will take place if learners do not depend on their L1, or if they do not translate. Many ELT professionals maintain that too much L1 use might deprive learners of valuable input in L2. According to Sharma (2006), the rationale for using only the TL in the classroom is that "the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they will learn; as they hear and use English, they will internalize it to begin to think in English; the only way they will learn it is if they are forced to use it". Even though most teachers and researchers would agree that the majority of classroom interaction should be conducted in English (Harbord, 1992), as Eldridge (1996) points out, there is "no empirical evidence to support the notion that restricting mother tongue use would necessarily improve learner efficiency. Auerbach (1993) reports that "evidence from research and practice is presented which suggests that the rationale used to justify English only in the classroom is neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound."

In addition to receiving quality English input, students also have to use the language.

Swain's (1985) 'comprehensive output' hypothesis highlights the importance of actively using the language in the classroom, apart from just receiving quality input. SLA research shows that language is best learned when the language is used for real, meaningful communication (Canale 1983, Nunan 1987, & Willis 1990). Based on SAL research, learners not only have to be exposed to the TL, but also use the language in a meaningful way through negotiated interaction with their teachers and classmates. Negotiation of meaning between learners, and between teachers and learners, is also seen as key to the SLA process (Allwright 1984, Brown 2001, Skehan 2001, Lightbrown & Spada 2006). Most of the input and output is negotiated through group and/or pair work that utilizes meaningful tasks. As Swain (1985) indicates, learners need to "push" themselves to produce comprehensible output that their interlocutor can understand. Instead of resorting to the L1, learners should adjust their output so as to make it comprehensible to their interlocutors. If learners use their L1, then nothing is negotiated; and therefore, little learning has taken place (Wharton, 2007).

Contemporary SLA research also emphasizes the use of inductive approach, which has gained great importance in the field of language teaching and learning. Inductive teaching is perceived as a notion that learning is achieved by means of observation and discovery. Rather than learning a set of rules or theories directly, students are encouraged to generalize or discover rules from given examples by themselves. Through "a voyage of discovery", as Breen (2001) phrases, an autonomous and meaningful context is built up simultaneously. When learners form their own understanding of the TL without being explicitly told by the teacher, then they will have a much better chance to internalize, retain and use the language productively afterwards (Wharton, 2007). Much of the discovery can take the form of problem-solving activities, which encourage students to make their hypotheses about the language. Although many studies have investigated the benefits of inductive approach, most teachers are still used to adopting the conventional deductive approach to language teaching. Brown (2000) contends that "discovery" can be a waste of precious time in the classroom. Johns (1991) goes one step further in suggesting that inductive language teaching "may show no discernable advantage over the more traditional deductive approach".

### **The Mother Tongue in the EFL Classroom**

Various studies have illustrated the learning benefits for students of utilizing some L1 in the classroom. It is known, however, that many ELT practitioners strictly prohibit

the use of their students' mother tongue in the classroom. Nunan (1999) describes a situation where an EFL teacher in China imposed fines on his students whenever they spoke Cantonese in the classroom, the effect of which, unsurprisingly, was that the students just fell silent. The teacher got his wish of 'No Cantonese', but ironically he did not elicit any English from his students either.

Weschler (1997) asserts that suppressing students' natural tendency to use their L1 only adds to the counter-productive tension already existed in the class and raises the affective filter of the students that much higher. Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) demonstrate that L1 can give students 'cognitive support' that provides them with the ability to explore language and produce work that is of higher standard. They suggest that teachers should acknowledge that the use of the L1 may be a normal psychological process that allows learners to initiate and sustain verbal interaction. Gabrielatos (2001) also points out that the bilingual/bicultural teacher is in a privileged position to enrich the process of learning by using the mother tongue as a resource, and by using the culture which the mother tongue embodies they can facilitate the progress of their students towards the other tongue, the other culture. Thus, it is equally important to take into account the learners' past experience and prior knowledge of the world. As Auerbach (1993) declares, starting with L1 gives a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experience, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English.

To further investigate areas in which L1 is resorted to for teaching EFL and find out to what extent this practice might be possible and valid, a number of studies have been undertaken in different parts of the world. For example, Cianflone (2009) in his research on L1 use in university English courses discovers that the interviewed students and teachers seem favorable to L1 use in terms of explanation of grammar, vocabulary items, difficult concepts and for general comprehension. Another study conducted by Sharma (2006) on the use of mother tongue in an EFL classroom setting of high school students in Nepal reveals that many respondents prefer occasional use of L1 in the EFL classroom for many reasons: to clarify the meaning of difficult words, to explain grammar rules, and to establish close relationship between students and teachers. In studies on comparing the effectiveness of various methods for learning vocabulary, it reports that an L1 translation is the most effective (Lado, Baldwin & Lobo 1967; Mishima 1967; Laufer & Shmueli 1997). This is probably because L1 translations are usually clear, short and familiar, qualities which are very important in effective

definitions (McKeown, 1993). Similar findings are found in Bouangeune's case study (2009) which also affirms the effectiveness of using L1 in teaching vocabulary through translation exercises and dictation.

Atkinson (1987) in his paper on the use of the mother tongue in the classroom reveals that how translation can still be used in some cases when there is a need for comprehension check. He refers to the translation of longer passages as "presentation and reinforcement of language", claiming that when students translate from their mother tongue into English, they can focus on accuracy and notice the key structural differences between the two texts, thus helping to avoid negative transfer. Trimble (1993) underscores how translation at times can facilitate students to more readily think in English for communicative and other work. Mukattash (2003) holds the same view that translation can be used as a teaching technique particularly in those areas where there is marked discrepancy between L1 and EFL system. He adds that translation can also be used in explicating English structures that are likely to be confused with each other, as well as disambiguating certain occurrences of ambiguous sentences. Similarly, Aurbach (1998) not only acknowledges the positive role of the mother tongue in the classroom, but also identifies the following uses of it: language analysis, class management, presenting grammar rules, giving instruction or prompts, explaining errors and checking for comprehension.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **Subjects**

A survey was carried out with 510 undergraduate students at China University of Science and Technology (CUST). Of these, 270 are freshmen, 239 are sophomores, and 1 is a junior. The participants are from 4 different colleges in school—the College of Engineering, Commerce & Management, Health Science & Technology, and Aviation. The subjects are at 3 proficiency level groups (beginning, mediocre, & advanced); there are 2 classes in each proficiency group, with 12 classes in total involved in this study. All of the student participants are currently taking Freshman English or the English Lab Course designed for second-year students. The only junior student in this case is a repeat class taker.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

The survey was distributed to 8 cooperating teachers of English at CUST, two of whom were native speakers of English and the rest were native speakers of Chinese. They, in turn, distributed the questionnaire to their respective classes to be filled in. Upon collecting the completed questionnaire, the researchers had several student part-timers help input the answers into the computer.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire was composed of four parts with two types of multiple-choice questions—single response and multiple response. The first part was devoted to general information about the subjects. The second part was designed to examine the respondents’ expectations towards their English teachers. The questions in part three & four were designed to obtain the participants’ perceptions and attitudes towards the teachers’ and learners’ use of Chinese in class, and the different occasions when they thought Chinese should be used in their EFL classrooms.

## IV. Results

Tables 1 and 2 below show the general characteristics of the subjects and their expectations towards their English teachers. A total of 510 students participated in the current study. The majority of these students are in their first and second year in school, and they are from four different colleges—213 in the College of Commerce & Management, 187 in Engineering, 64 in Health Science & Technology, and 46 in Aviation. The participants are at various proficiency levels—162 in beginning, 172 in mediocre, and 175 in advanced.

**Table 1: General background of the subjects**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Year</b>	Freshman	270	52.8	52.9	52.9
	Sophomore	239	46.8	46.9	99.8
	Junior	1	0.2	0.2	100.0
	Total	510	99.8	100.0	
<b>College</b>	Engineering	187	36.6	36.7	36.7
	Commerce & Management	213	41.7	41.8	78.4
	Aviation	46	9.0	9.0	87.5
	Health Science & Technology	64	12.5	12.5	100.0
	Total	510	99.8	100.0	

<b>Proficiency Level</b>	beginning	162	31.7	31.8	31.8
	mediocre	172	33.7	33.8	65.6
	advanced	175	34.2	34.4	100.0
	Total	509	99.6	100.0	

**Table 2: Students' expectations towards their English teachers**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
What would you like your English teacher to be? –A ROC national –A foreign national	60.3% 37.2%
If your English teacher is a foreign national, do you think he/she should acquire some knowledge of Chinese? –strongly agree –agree –neutral –disagree –strongly disagree	22.9% 49.6% 25.9% 1.0% 0.6%
If your English teacher is a foreign national, which of the following qualifications do you hope he/she has? (Multiple Response) –He/She must have a bachelor degree or above. –He/She must have a teaching license. –He/She must have prior teaching experience. –He/She must have an easygoing & open-minded personality. –He/She must have strong interest in the cultures & people of other countries. –He/She must have empathy for his/her students. –No qualification is necessary as long as he/she is a foreigner.	34.3% 42.9% 69.3% 82.7% 34.3% 65.9% 4.7%
If your English teacher is a foreign national, what courses would you like him/her to teach? (Multiple Response) –Listening –Speaking –Pronunciation –Reading –Writing –GEPT/TOEIC preparation course	58.5% 80.8% 69.0% 44.5% 28.1% 43.5%
If your English teacher is a ROC national, what courses would you like him/her to teach? (Multiple Response) –Listening –Speaking –Pronunciation –Reading –Writing –GEPT/TOEIC preparation course	52.3% 47.5% 40.2% 63.2% 45.5% 61.2%

According to the data collected, the majority of students expressed a stronger preference for native Chinese-speaking teachers over native English-speaking teachers: 60.3% to 37.2%. When asked whether they thought a foreign teacher should possess some knowledge of Chinese, a high percentage (72.5%) of the students responded

positively to this statement. As far as the teachers' qualifications were concerned, teachers with an easygoing and open-minded personality (82.7%) were strongly favored among students, followed by prior teaching experience (69.3%), and deep empathy for students (65.9%). In response to the courses taught by native English-speaking teachers, speaking (80.8%) was most desired and pronunciation (69.0%) and listening (58.5%). As for the local Chinese teachers of English, courses such as reading (63.2%), the GEPT/TOEIC test preparation (61.2%), and listening (52.3%) were considered highly preferable among the respondents.

**Table 3** reveals the students' perceptions towards the teachers' use of Chinese in the EFL classroom.

**Table 3: Students' views on the teachers' use of Chinese in the classroom**

Statements	Percentage
Do you think using Chinese in your English class is very important?	
- strongly agree	21.4%
- agree	35.1%
- neutral	39.6%
- disagree	3.9%
- strongly disagree	0%
Do you think your teacher should use Chinese in the classroom?	
- strongly agree	19.0%
- agree	35.1%
- neutral	40.8%
- disagree	4.70%
- strongly disagree	0.40%
How often do you think Chinese should be used in your English class?	
- always	14.7%
- sometimes	69.0%
- rarely	15.5%
- never	0.80%
When do you think it is appropriate for your teacher to use Chinese in class? (Multiple Response)	
- To define new vocabulary terms	76.9%
- To explain grammar rules	72.5%
- To explain difficult concepts	75.3%
- To check for comprehension	53.6%
- To give instructions	53.4%
- To conduct a test	20.1%
- To help students build self-confidence or feel more comfortable	48.6%
- To joke around with students	21.7%
- To explain the relationship between Chinese and English	54.6%
- To introduce the cultural differences	29.5%
If the objective of the course is to prepare students for the proficiency test, how much of Chinese do you think should be used in class in order to produce the most favorable results?	

70%~90%	17.3
50%~70%	51.7
30%~50%	24.1
10%~30%	6.04
0%	0.8

As shown in **Table 3**, more than half of the students (56.5%) believed that using Chinese in the EFL classroom was very important. Some students (39.6%) responded 'neutral' to this question. Only a very low percentage (3.9%) answered negatively. With regard to whether they thought teachers should use Chinese in class, over half of student participants (54.1%) in this study responded positively, whereas only 5.1% negatively. Approximately 83.7% of the students felt that Chinese should be used in their English classes to some degree: 14.7% preferred 'always', 69.0% 'sometimes', 15.5% 'rarely', and 0.80% 'never'. It is also apparent from Table 3 that Chinese was most essential to define new vocabulary terms (76.9%), to explain difficult concepts (75.3%) and grammar rules (72.5%) as well as the relationship between Chinese and English (54.6%), and lastly to check for comprehension (53.6%). A very noticeable percentage of students (93.1%) would like Chinese to be used on a large scale, if they were to prepare for the English proficiency test. Only 6.04% claimed that 10 to 30 percent of Chinese used was adequate to achieve the same purpose.

**Table 4** displays the students' views on the frequency of L1 use in EFL classes.

**Table 4: students' views on the frequency of L1 use in EFL classes**

College	always	sometimes	rarely	never	Total
Engineering	12.4%	67.7%	18.8%	1.1%	100.0%
Commerce & Management	18.4%	69.3%	11.8%	0.5%	100.0%
Aviation	10.9%	63.0%	23.9%	2.2%	100.0%
Health Science & Technology	12.5%	75.0%	12.5%	0.0%	100.0%

The most obvious finding drawn from **Table 4** is that students in the College of Aviation have generally shown less inclination towards the use of L1 in English classes: only 10.9% preferred 'always', 63.0% preferred 'sometimes', 23.9% preferred 'rarely', and 2.2% preferred 'never'. Their desire to learn English seems far more distinct than that of their counterparts. The researchers presume that their strong motivation for learning English might have something to do with their future profession, which usually requires a good knowledge of English.

**Table 5** describes the students' views on the learners' use of Chinese in the classroom.

**Table 5: Students' views on the learners' use of Chinese in the classroom**

Statements	Percentage
Do you think students can use Chinese in English class?	
- strongly agree	21.5%
- agree	49.7%
- neutral	27.2%
- disagree	1.4%
- strongly disagree	0.2%
When do you think it is appropriate to use Chinese in your English class? (Multiple Response)	
- To carry out small group work	54.0%
- To ask the teacher questions	67.7%
- To translate new vocabulary words for comprehension	63.3%
- To translate English passages for comprehension	58.0%
- To go over the exercises	49.8%
- To chat with the teacher	32.3%
If you prefer the use of Chinese in your class, why?	
- It's more comfortable.	29.9%
- I feel less tense or nervous.	47.7%
- I feel less lost.	22.4%
In your opinion, how much does using Chinese in your English class help you learn this language?	
- quite a lot	16.5%
- fairly much	54.2%
- a little	27.9%
- none	1.4%

Regarding the learners' use of Chinese in the EFL classroom, a sizeable number of students (71.2%) indicated that they would like to use Chinese in English class, whereas only 1.6% disagreed. Around 67.7% of the students saw Chinese as an appropriate use for asking the teacher questions and for translating new vocabulary words (63.3%) and English passages for comprehension (58.0%). When asked why they preferred the use of Chinese in class, 47.7% of the students pointed out that it helped them feel less tense or nervous, followed by 29.9% who felt it was more comfortable, and 22.4% who felt it helped them feel less lost. About 98.6% of the students felt Chinese helped facilitate their learning of English, and only about 1.4% thought it did not help at all.

## V. Discussion

The results of this study answered the following research questions that guided the present study.

1. What are the students' expectations towards their English teachers?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards the use of Chinese in the EFL classroom?
3. For what purposes do students think it is appropriate for both teachers and learners to use Chinese in the EFL classroom?
4. To what extent do students think that the use of Chinese in the classroom is necessary?
5. Are there statistically significant differences in students' preference for English teachers among subjects at different years, colleges, and proficiency levels?

First, in seeking students' views about their preference between native English-speaking teachers and native Chinese-speaking teachers, it was found that the general preference was for the latter. The most important qualities needed in a foreign teacher were: 1) having a good personality, 2) having previous experience in teaching, and 3) having more awareness of students' needs. The students felt it equally essential that native English-speaking teachers acquire some basic knowledge of Chinese, which implied that knowing learners' L1 may assist in EFL teaching and help bridge the cultural gap between teacher and student. The results also indicated that native English speaker teachers and native Chinese speaker teachers were each more suitable for teaching different types of EFL courses. There was a clear preference for native English-speaking teachers in the areas of speaking and pronunciation, whereas the local Chinese teachers of English in the areas of reading and proficiency exam preparation. These outcomes echoed those from Lasagabaster & Sierra's research study (2002) which revealed that the respondents showed a general preference for native English speaker teachers in the areas of pronunciation, speaking, and less so, the area of reading. With learning strategies and reading, on the other hand, the preference swung in the opposite direction towards non-native speaker teachers.

Second, the findings of this study demonstrated that the students as a whole had positive views towards the use of Chinese in English classes, and that teachers' use of the mother tongue was perceived mainly helpful in explaining the meaning of new

words, explaining grammar rules, as well as clarifying difficult concepts. Translation of new vocabulary and reading passages was clearly preferred by the students. These findings seemed to be consistent with those of Al-Nofaie (2010), Tang (2002), and Schweer (1999) which showed that both teachers and students responded positively towards the use of L1. In addition, the majority of students agreed that a reasonable use of Chinese in the EFL classroom was necessary, particularly in classes such as GEPT/TOEIC test preparation because they believed it would create a more comfortable learning environment, reduce the learners' affective filter, as well as enhance comprehension. Some EFL teachers the researchers interviewed privately also agreed that a limited use of L1 was more efficient in achieving rapid understanding of L2, and that L1 use may help students to be aware of the similarities and differences between linguistic structures, and consequently could provide accurate translation.

### Statistical analysis of cross-tabs

To further investigate whether there were significant differences in teacher preference among the subgroups of respondents, Crosstabs and Chi-Square tests were performed for statistical analysis.

**Table 6: Crosstabulation**

	A ROC national	A foreign national	Total
freshmen	169	96	265
sophomore	140	94	234
TOTAL	309	190	499

**Table 7: Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.435	2	0.488
Likelihood Ratio	1.777	2	0.411
N of Valid Cases	499		

**Tables 6** and **7** above show whether students' preference for native English speaking teachers varies according to the year they are in school. It was found that chi-square value = 1.435, p value = 0.488 > 0.05, denoting that there were no significant differences in teacher preference between the first-year and second-year students.

**Table 8: Crosstabulation**

College	A ROC national	A foreign national	Total
Engineering	127	57	184

Commerce & Management	122	88	210
Aviation	21	22	43
Health Science & Technology	40	23	63
TOTAL	310	190	500

**Table 9: Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.431	3	0.038*
Likelihood Ratio	8.427	3	0.038*
N of Valid Cases	500		

**Tables 8 and 9** illustrate whether students' preference for English teachers varies according to the college they belong to. It was found that chi-square value = 8.431, p value = 0.038 < 0.05, denoting that significant differences were apparent among students of different colleges. It was shown that native English speaker teachers were most welcomed by students in the College of Aviation. The researchers assume it is because aviation students have long realized that English is an important component in their future career. In aviation-related industries, it seems very likely that they will be working with foreigners or even working abroad, and therefore having a good command of English is crucially important to them.

**Table 10: Crosstabulation**

	A ROC national	A foreign national	Total
beginning	92	67	159
mediocre	103	63	166
advanced	114	60	174
TOTAL	309	190	499

**Table 11: Chi-Square Test**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.067	2	0.356
Likelihood Ratio	2.066	2	0.356
N of Valid Cases	499		

**Tables 10 and 11** demonstrate whether students' preference for native and non-native teachers varies according to their levels of proficiency. It was found that chi-square value = 2.067, p value = 0.356 > 0.05, denoting that there were no significant differences in teacher preference between advanced level students and low level students.

## VI. Conclusion

Despite the obvious limitations of the study, including the relatively small sample of respondents, which only reflects the views of Taiwanese students from one technological university, there are some findings that can be drawn from the research. The most important finding is that there is indeed a place for the mother tongue or L1 in EFL classrooms. The teachers' use of the mother tongue was perceived particularly helpful for certain aspects of language learning. Another salient finding is that students in the aviation program seem to have a predilection for English-medium instruction, but less so students with other academic backgrounds. It is known that having good communication skills in English is a mandatory job requirement in the aviation operational and managerial contexts. The fact that they are aware of the importance of good English competence needed in their chosen career has, without question, enhanced their motivation for learning the language. It is recommended therefore that schools seek for native English teachers with preferably some basic knowledge of Chinese, or Chinese English teachers who are fluent in oral English and are confident in teaching the language of English through the medium of English, so as to satisfy the needs, both academic and occupational, of aviation students.

The researchers agree with the idea that EFL learners need as much exposure as possible to English during limited class time, the only time in their daily lives when they encounter the target language, and that by forcing them to think and speak in English, they are therefore compelled to produce comprehensible output and negotiate meaning. However, the researchers suggest that in contrast to traditional Communicative Language Teaching methodology, a controlled and judicious use of L1 can have both pedagogical and affective positive effects in EFL classes. As Mai-ling (1996) advises, "speaking English in class with little regard to whether the students understand or not will result only in 'meaningless exposure'. On the other hand, using L1 arbitrarily will easily lead to the overuse of it, which is equally harmful to language learning. It would perhaps be 'profitable' if teachers could use L1 sensibly as an effective supplementary teaching medium, but not as a float that they grasp for survival" (p.98).

In conclusion, the use of the mother tongue or L1 is sometimes indispensable since it fulfills certain functions and purposes for the learners. Instead of throwing away this great resource, not to mention the cultural aspect, L1 should become widely acceptable as a necessary and facilitating tool for EFL learners. All this is of particular importance

if the instructional goal is to create a student-centered learning environment as most recent methodological trends seem to be suggesting these days.

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