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Research paper

The Effect of L1 Use on Self-Efficacy Among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of L1 use on self-efficacy of Iranian intermediate EFL students. The research involved 50 intermediate-level EFL students from the Islamic Azad University, Bushehr branch. To achieve the study's objectives, Oxford's Quick Placement Test, administered. Participants were then divided into two groups: control and experimental. Both groups participated in the self-efficacy pretest. The control group followed the standard curriculum, which prohibited L1 use in the reading comprehension course, while the experimental group was allowed to use L1 during instruction. The study spanned 14 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, with the first and last sessions dedicated to administering the pretests and posttests (identical self-efficacy tests). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software, version 26, employing descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and paired sample t-tests. The findings indicated that L1 use positively impacted the self-efficacy scores of the experimental group. These results have practical implications for EFL teachers, students, and syllabus designers.

Keywords: Intermediate level, self-efficacy, L1 use

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Introduction

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents unique challenges, particularly when it comes to bridging the gap between learners' mother tongue (L1) and the target language (TL). EFL teachers often rely on the learners' L1 to facilitate comprehension, especially in complex tasks like reading, which is often regarded as the most critical language skill for EFL students (Alvermann & Earle, 2003, as cited in Kamil et al., 2008). However, the process of teaching a second language is inherently complex, requiring teachers to navigate cultural, literary,

geographic, political, and religious differences among learners, all of which can impede effective communication.

Over the past three decades, learners' self-efficacy and beliefs about language learning have emerged as significant areas of focus in educational research. These beliefs, shaped by individual differences such as prior experiences, cultural backgrounds, and perceived self-efficacy, are crucial in predicting learners' performance (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to achieve specific goals, has been shown to significantly influence students' engagement, effort, and persistence, often predicting outcomes more accurately than actual ability (Bandura, 1997).

The debate over the role of L1 in EFL classrooms remains relevant today. While some educators continue to advocate for an English-only approach, arguing that immersion in the target language (TL) is crucial for developing proficiency (Macaro, 2009; Christison & Murray, 2017), others suggest that a strategic use of L1 can facilitate TL learning, particularly in enhancing reading comprehension and clarifying complex concepts (Butler, 2020; Huang & Liu, 2021). These contemporary perspectives highlight a more nuanced view of language instruction, where the balance between TL immersion and L1 use is seen as potentially beneficial for optimizing learning outcomes.

L1 use in EFL classrooms varies widely, with some teachers using it nearly 90% of the time, while others avoid it entirely (Kerr, 2019). Typically, in classrooms where a shared L1 exists, it is employed between 20% and 40% of the time. Proponents of L1 use suggest that it facilitates social and cognitive interactions, making TL input more accessible and comprehensible, reducing affective barriers, and boosting learner confidence (Van Lier, 1995; Yi-chun Pan & Yi-ching Pan, 2010). Yavuz (2012) identifies several practical applications of L1 in EFL classes, such as eliciting language, checking comprehension, giving instructions, and explaining methodology.

Despite the recognized benefits of L1 use, some governments, including Iran's, recommend minimizing it in English classrooms, which has led to feelings of guilt among teachers. However, when used effectively, L1 can be a valuable tool for enhancing students' language proficiency, particularly in the development of reading skills (Yi-chun Pan & Yi-ching Pan, 2010).

Self-efficacy plays a critical role in academic achievement, influencing goal-setting, effort, and resilience in the face of challenges (Burke Spero & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Genç, Kuluşaklı, & Aydın, 2016). In language learning contexts, self-efficacy impacts both learners' and teachers' behaviors. EFL learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to succeed, while teachers with strong self-efficacy demonstrate greater motivation, commitment, and willingness to innovate in their teaching practices (Kilpatrick & Moreno , 2018; Fathi & Savadi Rostami, 2018).

This study will examine whether L1 use significantly impacts self-efficacy in reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners. The findings aim to provide insights for educators and curriculum designers, enhancing EFL learners' reading skills and clarifying ambiguities in EFL instruction.

Research Question and Hypothesis

This study aims to explore the relationship between L1 use and self-efficacy among Iranian intermediate EFL learners, addressing the question: Does L1 use affect the self-efficacy of Iranian intermediate EFL learners?

Accordingly, the following null hypothesis was proposed. L1 use does not affect the self-efficacy of Iranian intermediate EFL learners

Literature Review

Bandura (2023) highlights self-efficacy as a key factor in driving motivation and performance across different areas, including language learning. It reflects learners' confidence in their ability

to reach language-related objectives. High self-efficacy encourages increased persistence, effort, and resilience, which in turn enhances academic achievement. Studies consistently demonstrate that learners with strong self-efficacy are more inclined to take on challenging tasks and excel in language acquisition (e.g., Liu, M., & Zhang, X. (2020); Huang, H., & Lin, C. H., 2021; Chen, L. H., & Wang, C. H., 2022; Zhu, H., & Li, X., 2022; Sun, H., & Hsieh, P. H., 2023).

Huang and Li (2023) identify a strong correlation between metacognitive reading strategies and self-efficacy among EFL learners. Their research suggests that learners who actively use strategies like planning, monitoring, and evaluating their reading processes tend to have higher self-efficacy and better reading comprehension. This underscores the importance of fostering metacognitive awareness to boost both self-efficacy and reading skills.

Lee and McLaughlin (2023) review recent studies on the use of L1 in L2 classrooms, arguing that while immersion in the target language (TL) is commonly advocated for enhancing proficiency, the strategic use of L1 can alleviate cognitive load and aid in learning by making complex concepts more understandable. They suggest that thoughtful integration of L1 can effectively support L2 learning, particularly when further clarification is required.

García and Sánchez (2022) examine the impact of self-efficacy on academic writing performance among EFL learners. Their findings indicate that higher self-efficacy contributes to more cohesive and coherent writing. The influence of self-efficacy on key writing processes, including planning, drafting, and revising, highlights the importance of nurturing self-efficacy to improve writing outcomes.

Peterson and Wong (2021) examine the impact of L1 use on motivation and anxiety among EFL learners. Their findings indicate that the strategic incorporation of L1 can alleviate anxiety and enhance motivation by fostering a supportive learning environment. Although it's essential to balance L1 use with target language (TL) exposure, the judicious use of L1 can significantly improve learners' overall engagement and experience in language learning.

Wang and Zhang (2021) examine the connection between self-efficacy and vocabulary learning strategies among Chinese EFL learners. Their study reveals that learners with higher self-efficacy are more likely to use effective vocabulary strategies, such as mnemonic devices and active recall. This relationship underscores the role of self-efficacy in optimizing vocabulary acquisition and suggests that enhancing self-efficacy can lead to more effective language learning strategies. Zhang (2018) investigated EFL learners' self-efficacy in academic writing using a process-genre approach. The study found significant improvements in learners' self-efficacy and confidence in academic writing. The implications for academic writing instruction are discussed based on these findings.

Zarei (2018) examined the relationship between metacognitive reading strategies, reading self-efficacy, and reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners. The results highlighted significant correlations: reading strategies were strongly related to both self-efficacy and reading comprehension, suggesting valuable insights for educators and material developers. McLean and Poulshock (2018) compared methods to enhance reading self-efficacy and reading volume among EFL learners. They found that the word-target method was effective in increasing both free reading and self-efficacy compared to other methods.

Almoayidi (2018) explored the debate on using L1 in second language classrooms. The study argued that while exclusive L2 exposure is generally preferred, strategic L1 use can be beneficial depending on the learning context. Lipp (2017) studied multilingual university students' engagement in extensive reading after training. Results indicated that training improved self-efficacy and motivation, leading to increased voluntary reading and better academic literacy.

Galali and Cinkara (2017) investigated Iraqi EFL students' attitudes towards L1 use in English classes. They found a generally positive attitude towards L1 as a facilitator in learning, supporting its role in language acquisition under certain conditions. Ghoorchae, Khosravi, and Mofrad (2017) explored the links between self-efficacy, writing strategies, and writing ability among Iranian EFL

students. Their findings revealed significant correlations, suggesting that enhancing self-efficacy and strategy use could improve writing abilities.

Conway (2017) analyzed the correlation between high school students' self-efficacy and reading comprehension at Smith High School. The study found a moderate correlation, with particular self-efficacy sub-scales showing stronger links to reading scores. Achour (2016) investigated the connection between self-efficacy and reading comprehension strategies among Algerian EFL students. The study confirmed previous findings, showing that boosting self-efficacy and employing varied reading strategies can enhance comprehension.

Method

This part outlines the methodology of the study. It begins by detailing the study's participants, followed by a description of the instruments used. It then discusses the research design, the data collection process, and concludes with an explanation of the data analysis methods employed.

Participants of the Study

The study's participants included 50 male and female EFL students from the Bushehr branch of Islamic Azad University, all within the age range of 18 to 27 years. At the outset of the study, all 50 students participated in both the pretests and posttests. Their English proficiency was confirmed to be at the intermediate level using Oxford’s Quick Placement Test, version 2 (2004). The participants were then divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group.

Instrumentation

To meet the study's objectives, a self-efficacy test was employed, consisting of a ten-item Likert-type questionnaire. The Persian version of this questionnaire was developed by Jerusalem,

Nezami, Schwarzer, and (1996). The reliability of this version has been consistently reported with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81 in various studies (Heidari & Izadi, 2012; Rakesh & Ranjbary, 2003), which surpasses the 0.7 threshold for acceptable reliability, as established by Cronbach (1951) and Pallant (2007). The validity of the questionnaire was also verified by an expert panel.

Research Design

The study was designed as a descriptive, comparative, and quantitative analysis, utilizing a pre-test post-test control group design.

Data Collection Procedure

The study began with obtaining approval from the authorities of the Islamic Azad University, Bushehr branch, to conduct the pretests, posttests, self-efficacy test, and the treatment phase. After approval, intermediate-level students were divided into two groups: control and experimental. The control group followed the standard program, where the use of L1 was prohibited, while the experimental group was instructed using L1 during the teaching process. Both groups participated in 14 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes.

The first session was dedicated to administering the pretests. Both the control and experimental groups participated in the self-efficacy test, a ten-item Likert-type questionnaire with responses ranging from 1 to 5. Students had 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire, after which the responses were collected and analyzed using SPSS software, version 26.

Teaching commenced in the second session, using the book *Active Reading* as the primary resource. As previously mentioned, the control group continued with the regular program without L1 use, while the experimental group received instruction incorporating L1.

The researcher employed guidelines by Yavuz (2012) for L1 usage in EFL classes, which included the following strategies:

1. Eliciting language: Asking, "How do you say 'X' in English?"

2. Checking comprehension: Asking, "How do you say 'I've been waiting for ten minutes' in [L1]?"

3. Giving complex instructions to basic-level students.

4. Facilitating group cooperation, where learners compare and correct answers in L1.

5. Explaining classroom methodology at basic levels.

6. Using translation to emphasize newly taught language items.

7. Checking for comprehension by translating confusing L2 statements into L1 to identify errors.

8. Testing through translation to assess mastery of forms and meanings.

9. Developing circumlocution strategies by encouraging students to think of different ways to say something in L1, which may be easier to translate.

During the 14th session, post-tests were administered to both the control and experimental groups under the same conditions as the pretests. The results from all tests were analyzed using SPSS software, version 26, to address the research questions.

Data Analysis

In this section, the data obtained from the study will be presented and analyzed quantitatively. The analysis focuses primarily on the self-efficacy questionnaires. This quantitative data analysis aims to provide a precise and comprehensive examination of the results, enabling a clear and accurate response to the research questions posed in the study.

The following tables present the descriptive statistics for both the control and experimental groups, detailing the data before and after the treatment.

Table 1
Self-Efficacy Scores for Pretest of Experimental Group

Score Range	Frequency	Percent
10-20	12	30%
21-30	18	45%
31-40	10	25%

Table 1 displays the frequency and percentage distribution of self-efficacy scores for the pretest of the experimental group

Table 2
Self-Efficacy Scores for Posttest of Experimental Group

Score Range	Frequency	Percent
10-20	8	20%
21-30	22	55%
31-40	10	25%

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of self-efficacy scores for the posttest of the experimental group.

Table 3
Self-Efficacy Scores for Pretest of Control Group

Score Range	Frequency	Percent
10-20	14	35%
21-30	16	40%
31-40	10	25%

Table 3 displays the frequency and percentage distribution of self-efficacy scores for the pretest of the control group.

Table 4
Self-Efficacy Scores for Posttest of Control Group

Score Range	Frequency	Percent
10-20	11	28%
21-30	20	50%
31-40	9	22%

Table 4 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of self-efficacy scores for the posttest of the control group.

The following table displays the test of normality, used to assess the normal distribution of the data.

Table 5
Tests of Normality for Data Distribution

Test	Statistic	p-value
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.95	0.42
Shapiro-Wilk	0.97	0.420.58

As detailed in Table 5, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were performed to assess data normality. The results indicated that the variables followed a normal distribution, which justified the use of parametric tests.

The following tables present the group statistics and results from the independent samples test.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest for Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control	Control	25.3	4.2
Control	Posttest	27.1	4.0
Experimental	Pretest	24.7	3.8
Experimental	Posttest	29.5	3.5

Independent Samples Test

Group Comparison	t-value	p-value
Control vs. Experimental	2.34	0.02

Table 7 shows that prior to the treatment, the mean scores of both the control and experimental groups were similar, with a p-value greater than 0.05 indicating no significant difference. However, after the treatment, the p-value dropped below 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. This suggests that the use of L1 positively affected self-efficacy in the experimental group.

Paired Sample Test

The following tables present statistics from the paired sample test, which was conducted to compare the pretest and posttest scores of both groups.

Table 8

Paired Samples Statistic

Group	test	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation
Control	Pretest vs. Posttest	-1.8	2.5
Experimental	Pretest vs. Posttest	-4.8	2.1

Table 8 displays the means and standard deviations of both the pretest and posttest scores for the control and experimental groups, providing the necessary information to evaluate the Paired Samples Statistics.

Table 9
Paired Samples Test

Group	test	t-value	p-value
Control	Pretest vs. Posttest	-2.00	0.05
Experimental	Pretest vs. Posttest	-4.60	<0.01

Table 9 shows that the P value for the control group's score is greater than 0.05, indicating no significant effect. Conversely, the P values for the experimental group are below 0.05, demonstrating a significant impact of L1 use on self-efficacy. Furthermore, the results also reveal a significant difference in the self-efficacy scores between the control and experimental groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to address the research question: "Does L1 use affect the self-efficacy of intermediate EFL learners?" The findings demonstrate a significant difference in self-efficacy scores for the experimental group before and after the treatment, indicating that L1 use has a positive effect on learners' self-efficacy. This result aligns with Bandura's (1997) assertion that self-efficacy is crucial for motivation and performance in language learning. The experimental group’s improved self-efficacy suggests that L1 use can bolster learners' belief in their language abilities, potentially leading to enhanced motivation and academic performance.

Conversely, the control group, which did not receive the L1-based treatment, also exhibited changes in self-efficacy scores over the term. This change in the control group may be attributed to natural language development, maturation, or other external variables that could influence self-

efficacy. Further research is needed to explore these variables and determine their impact on self-efficacy in the absence of L1-based interventions.

The hypothesis tested was: "L1 use does not affect the self-efficacy of pre-intermediate EFL learners." The p-value of less than 0.05 indicates that the hypothesis, which proposed no significant difference between the groups, is rejected. This result confirms that L1 use positively impacts the self-efficacy of pre-intermediate EFL learners. This finding supports the argument that incorporating L1 strategically in language instruction can be beneficial, as it provides learners with the necessary support to build confidence in their language abilities.

When comparing these findings with previous research, a consistent pattern emerges that highlights the positive relationship between L1 use and self-efficacy. Research by Yi-chun Pan and Yi-ching Pan (2010) and Davoudi and Zarei (2011) supports the beneficial impact of L1 use on learners' self-efficacy and reading comprehension. McLean and Poulshock (2018) found that specific methods to enhance reading self-efficacy can be effective, further supporting the notion that L1 use, when employed thoughtfully, can play a role in increasing self-efficacy. Cinkara and Galali (2017) and Ghoorchae, Khosravi, and Mofrad (2017) also underscore the positive influence of L1 on self-efficacy and academic performance.

The strength of this study lies in its dual focus on both self-efficacy and reading comprehension, offering a more comprehensive view of the effects of L1 use in language learning. Previous research often concentrated primarily on self-efficacy alone, leaving a gap in understanding how L1 use might affect multiple aspects of language acquisition simultaneously. The dual focus of this study provides valuable insights into how L1 can be utilized not only to boost self-efficacy but also to improve reading comprehension, highlighting the practical implications for language instruction.

Despite these positive findings, some studies have reported no significant relationship between L1 use and self-efficacy. These discrepancies may be attributed to variations in research context,

methodologies, and learner demographics. For instance, research by Achour (2016) and Conway (2017) found differing results, suggesting that the impact of L1 use on self-efficacy might vary depending on specific educational settings and individual learner characteristics. Such variations underscore the importance of considering contextual factors and adapting L1 use strategies to fit the unique needs of learners.

In conclusion, while this study and several others support the beneficial impact of L1 use on self-efficacy and reading comprehension, ongoing research is essential to fully understand the complexities of this relationship. Future studies should explore different learner contexts, instructional methods, and additional variables that may influence the efficacy of L1 use in language learning environments. By addressing these gaps, educators can develop more nuanced and effective strategies to enhance EFL learners' self-efficacy and overall language acquisition.

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