



“L1, or no L1: that is the question.”

How do we reconcile the ethical implications of this issue in the context of the adult ELICOS classroom?

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## Ethical dilemma:

- Unequivocal commitment to “English only”
- Student resistance, so more stringent approaches
- Conflicting issues:
  - Cultural imperialism?
  - Importance of affect in SLA
  - Fee-paying students
  - Our moral obligation to provide value
  - Adults responsible for their own decisions

## Outline of presentation:

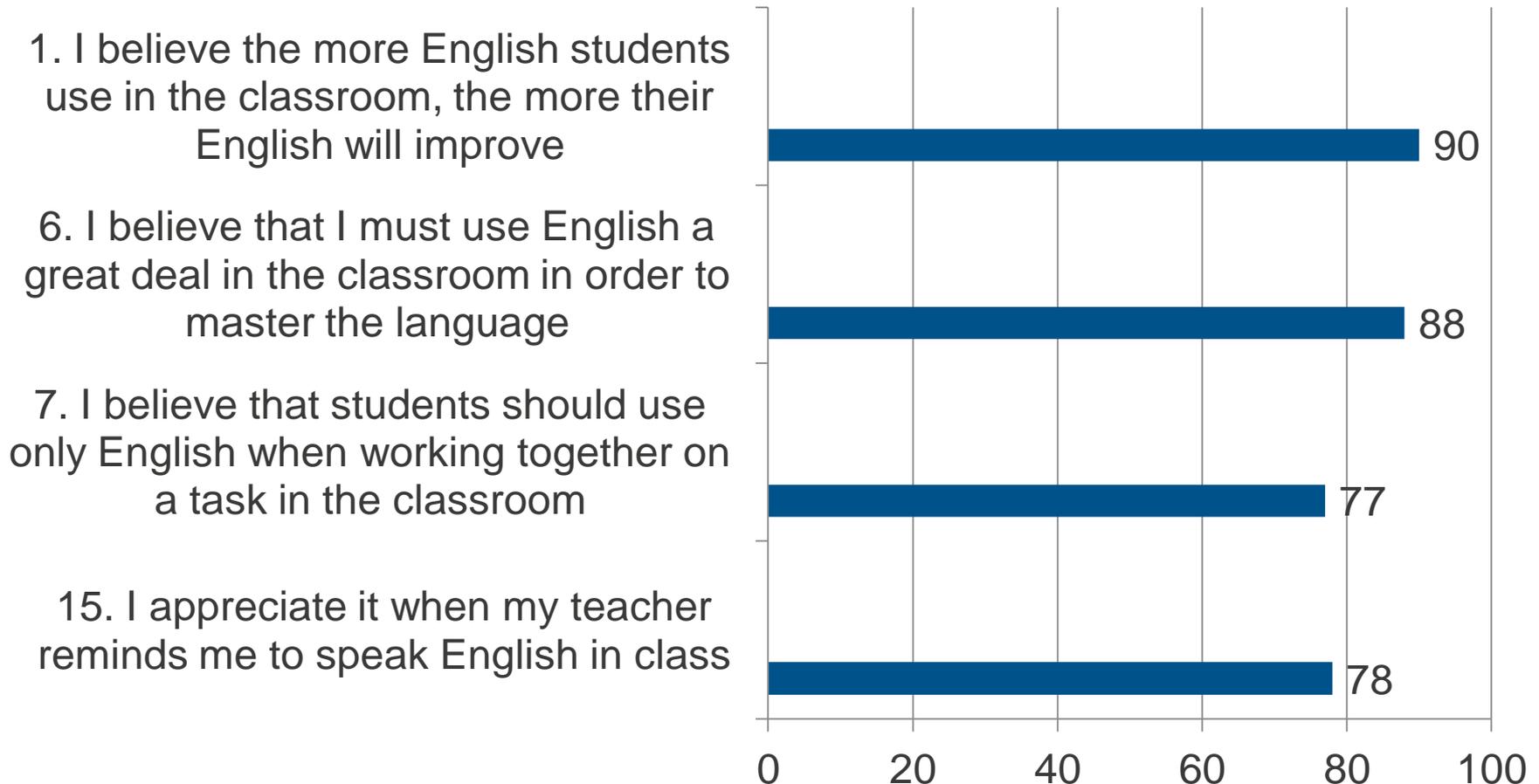
- Own ethical dilemma
- Student survey and results
- L1 as learning resource in learning L2?
- Socio-cognitive functions of L1 in L2 classroom
- Role of L1 in 2<sup>nd</sup> language reading
- Learners' views and affect in the classroom
- L1 and learner identity & other ethical considerations

# Questionnaire on student L1 use in the classroom:

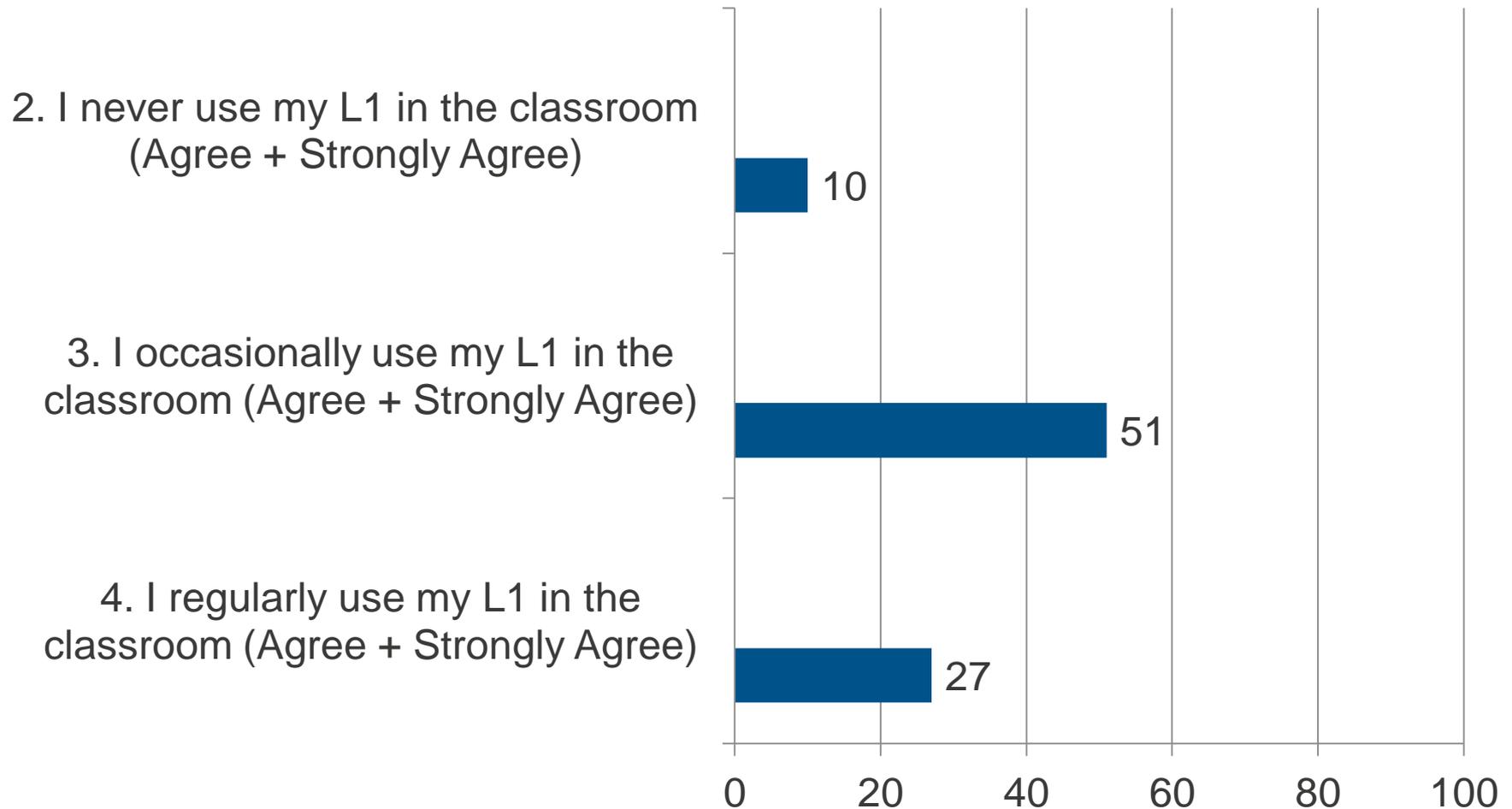
- 17 questions
  - 15 using number scale 1-5, Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree
  - 2 short answer questions
- 83 responses from a possible 129 (64% response rate) from 8 classes of students with Advanced levels of proficiency in DEP (Bridging)
- 71 speakers of Chinese
- 12 speakers of other languages: Japanese, Arabic, Persian, Spanish, Portuguese and Thai

# Survey results: Beliefs and attitudes

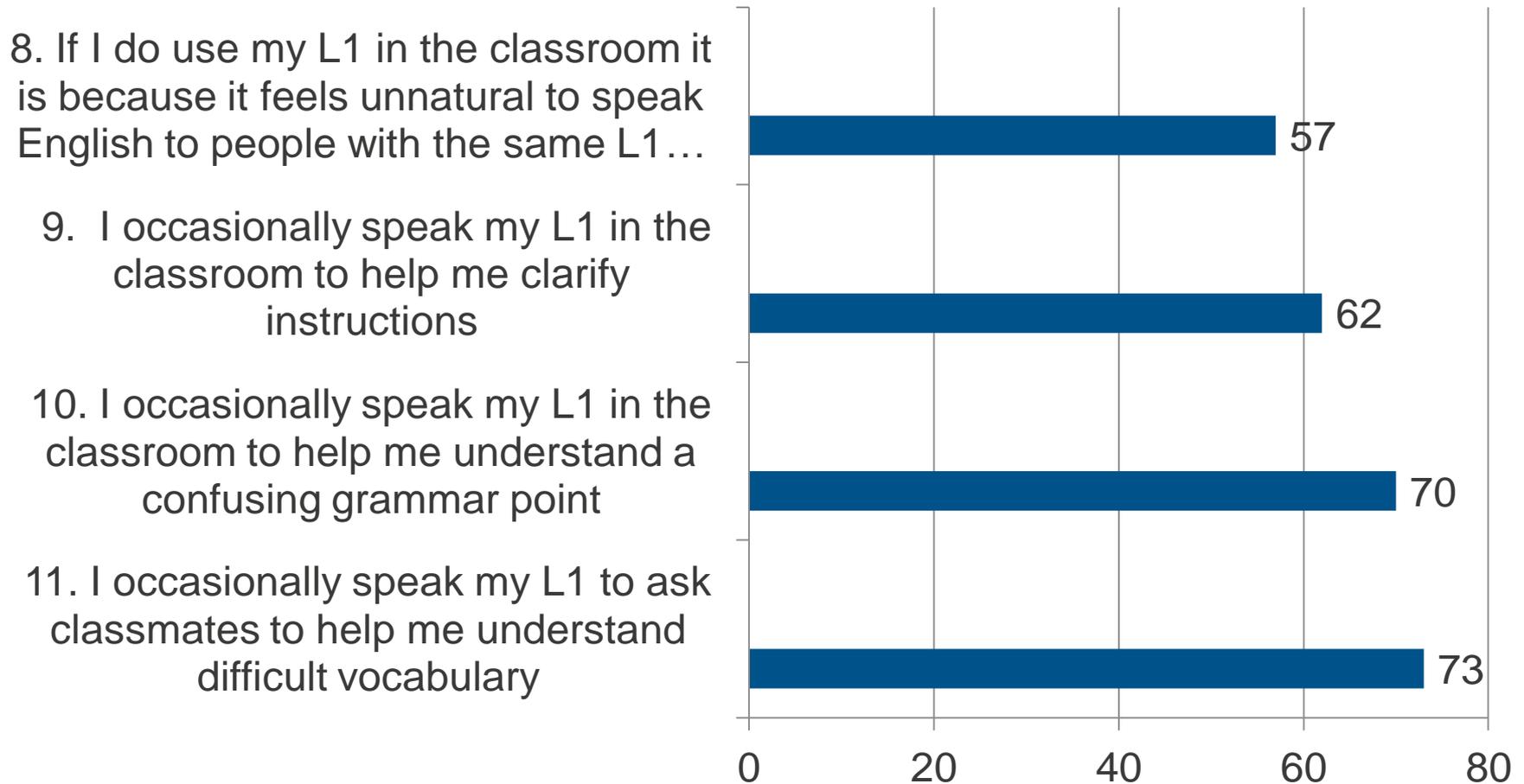
(Agree + Strongly Agree %)



# Survey results: Actual student use of L1 (%)



# Survey results: Reasons for using L1 (Agree + Strongly Agree %)



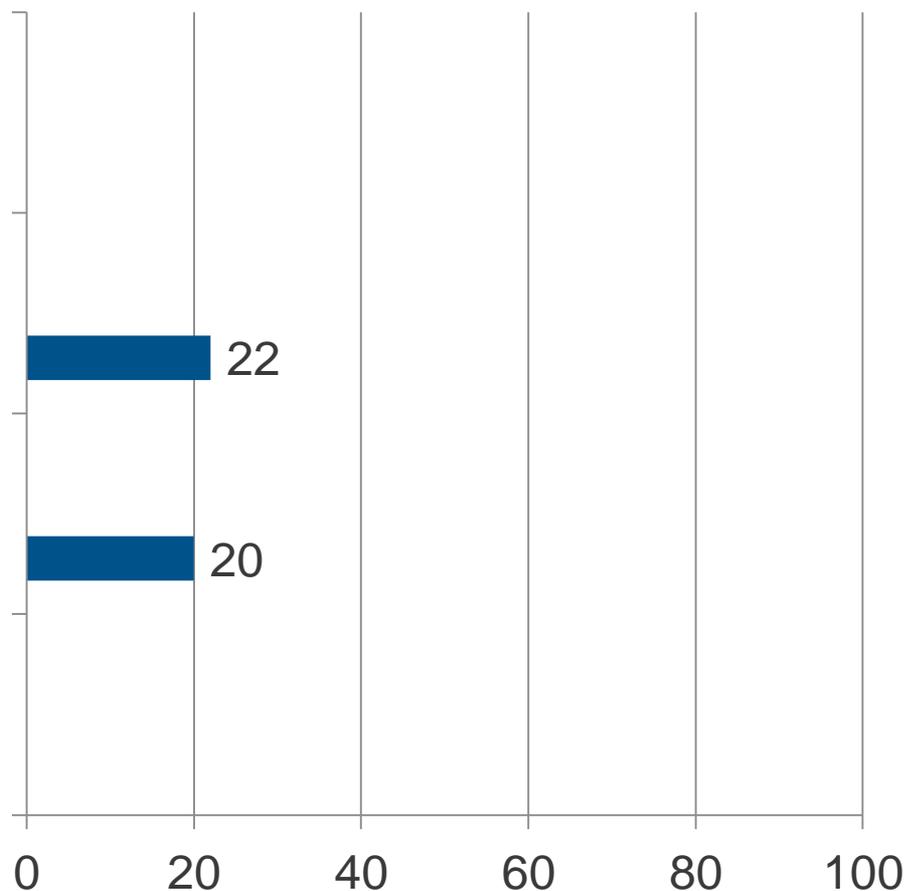
# Survey results: Reasons for using L1 (%) continued

Q12. I sometimes speak in my L1 when I don't want the teacher to understand what I am saying (Agree + Strongly Agree)

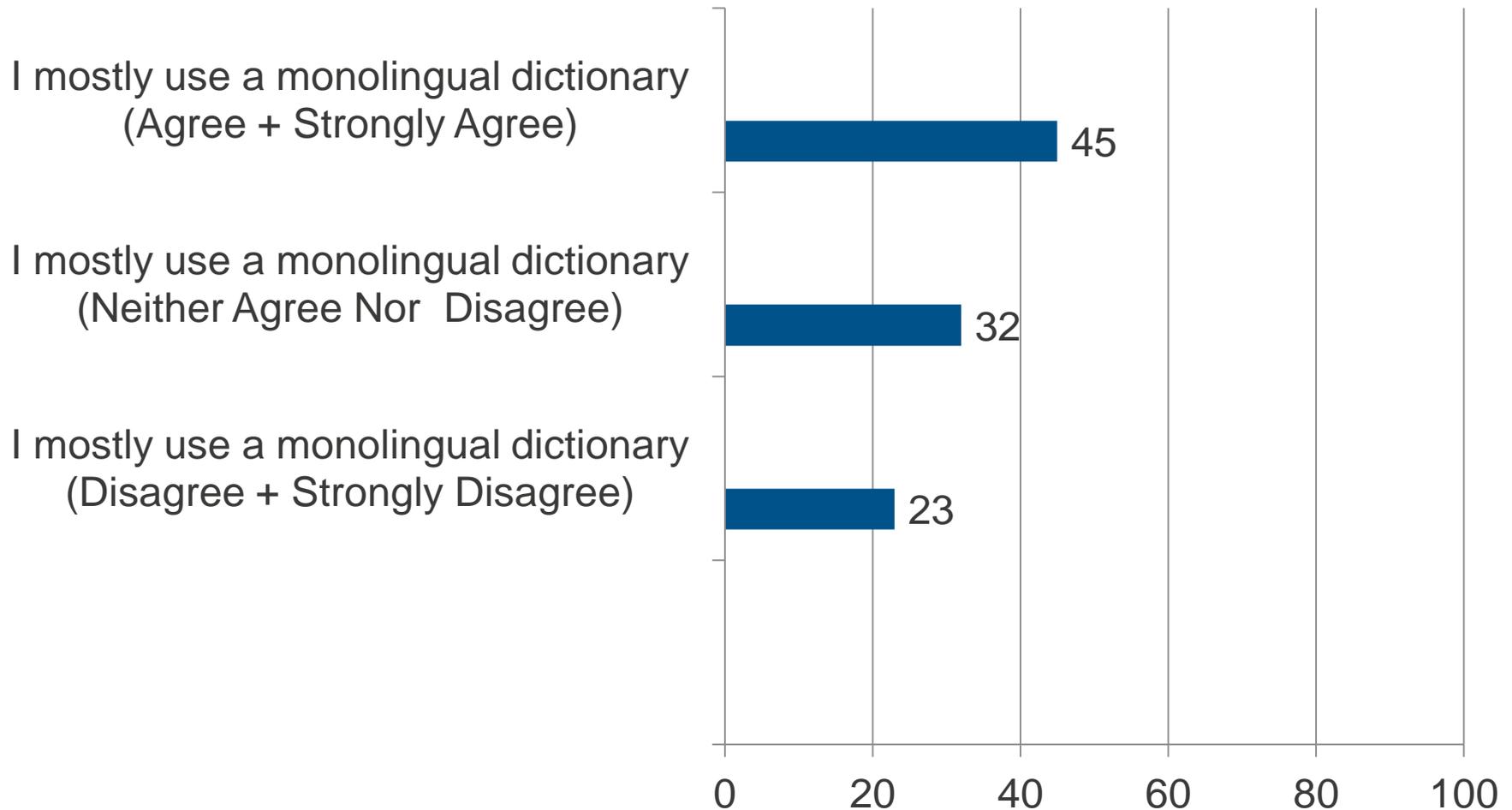
22

Q13. I feel happier and more motivated if I sometimes use my L1 (Agree + Strongly Agree)

20



# Survey results: Use of dictionaries (%)



## Q16. How does using your L1 in the classroom help you?

- *I feel more confidence when I am talking with my classmate. I can express my opinions better.*
- *To understand some words and vocabularies which are hard to explain in English.*
- *Not at all. We should speak English in classroom and any other place.*
- *To clarify some missed words or sentences.*
- *Generally, when I can't understand some difficult words or some grammar point, I will speak with my classmate in L1.*
- *It is an easier way to communicate to other Chinese students, especially when we are talking about our previous study in China.*
- *It is easy to make a joke in first language.*

## Q16. continued

- *No one in my classroom speak my L1, but if so, use my L1 would help me to understand some vocabulary, but just in high difficult cases, rarely. (L1: Portuguese).*
- *Sometimes when I cannot understand the difficult word.*
- *To explain something to others.*
- *Help me to understand some grammar difficulties.*
- *Explain the word which I want to say, but can't remember.*
- *Grammar question is hard to understand by explaining in English. Also, the explanation of some vocabs.*
- *To relax.*
- *Sometimes, maybe need the first language to understand easily and quickly.*

## Q16. continued

- *Sometimes we can explain things which were complex for my classmates in L1. It's because some of them have weak language.*
- *When I want to explain something to my classmates while I cannot find the right English words, I will try to use my L1 to help make it clearly.*
- *Mostly, using L1 cannot help students with their lessons. L1 tends to be a distraction for students. Unless one miss a fairly important point and is unable to solve it in English, I cannot see a reason he or she using L1!  
(L1: Chinese)*
- *For a complex definition such as philosophy, politics, etc.*
- *When miss some points, can catch up teachers quickly.*
- *I use my L1 in the classroom when I can't understand something, or cannot describe something clearly to my classmates.*

## Q16. continued

- *To understand complex grammatical rules. (L1: Persian).*
- *Sometimes you cannot describe what you want to say, which makes you really nervous. Particularly, you cannot understand what the meaning about teacher said when you first time came here. However, someone who come from the same country as you can help you without language problems.*

## **In brief, L1 can sometimes offer students:**

- Efficiency when clarifying vocabulary or grammar
- Convenience
- Social relationships
- A way to relieve pressure
- A way to connect with others in the English classroom
- Greater confidence while learning English

# L1 as learning resource?

- L1 forms part of the learner's social identity and can make a cognitive and linguistic contribution to the task of learning L2 (Ellis, 2007)
- Students made minimal use of L1 in task based learning:
  - For task management & clarification
  - To explain difficult vocabulary
  - To explain confusing grammatical structures
  - To argue a point
- L1 may be a normal psychological process allowing learners to initiate and sustain verbal interaction (although did not demonstrate L1 more useful than L2.) (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003)

# L1 as learning resource? (continued)

- L1 played an important role in contributing to the learning of new L2 items through comprehension checks, clarifications, negotiation of meaning and keeping the communication channels open (Chau, 2007).
- Own advanced class: minimal use of L1 by students to translate or negotiate meaning, keep communication channels open and for purely social reasons.

# Socio-cognitive functions of L1 in the L2 classroom

- Speaking as a cognitive tool: through collaborative dialogue during problem-solving tasks, whether in L1 or L2, students engage in co-constructing their L2 and building knowledge about it (Swain & Lapkin, 2000)
- “L1 is used as a powerful tool of semiotic mediation between learners ...and within individuals” ;
  - Collective scaffolding
  - To build a social & cognitive space (build cooperative atmosphere while working on task, ensuring its completion)
  - To externalize one’s inner speech(Anton & DiCamilla, 1999, p.234)

# Role of L1 in L2 reading

- Reading in L2 not a monolingual event
- L2 readers have access to their L1 as they read and many use it as a strategy to help comprehend an L2 text
- While reading in L2, L1 used by intermediate and advanced learners, and to a lesser extent post-ESL students to:
  - Reflect on meaning
  - Monitor own reading strategies
  - Reflect on meaning

(findings of study by Thomas Upton and Li-Chun Lee-Thompson, using think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews with 20 speakers of Chinese and Japanese at three levels of proficiency studying at Midwestern US university in 2001)

# Role of L1 in L2 reading (continued)

- Research findings support Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning:
  - sees inner speech as the foundation of thought & suggests the L1 would naturally serve as a tool to help students think about and make sense of the structures, content and meaning of any L2 texts that they read (1986, as cited in Upton and Lee-Thompson, 2001).
- Studies show that overall use and success of calling on the L1 to aid in L2 reading comprehension is determined by reader's overall L2 proficiency and as L2 proficiency increases, learners' cognitive reliance on these strategies declines (Hawras, 1996; Kern, 1994; Upton, 1997, as cited in Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001).

# Affect in SLA

- The differences between the engaged and unengaged language learner, lie in the emotions students experience during language learning, ...attitudes alone are not sufficient to support motivation. (MacIntyre, 2002, as cited in Bown & White, 2010)
- “...may be unrealistic to expect learners to restrict themselves to the target language when they can express themselves more fully in a language they can all understand, but it is also important to find ways to continue to encourage use of the target language” (Crandall, 1999).

# Affective factors in the classroom (continued)

## ▪ Student views:

- while they see some positives in terms of building social relationships and relieving pressure at times, in the majority of cases, L1 not a motivator, on the contrary, higher motivation and confidence attributed to the use of the target language (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008 and own study).
- regarded use of the TL as rewarding experience and stated that the more they used it, the less anxious they were about it (Levine, 2003) .

## Further ethical considerations:

- If use of a particular linguistic code can represent a particular identity, it could be argued denial of the use of a certain language could be a truncation of one's linguistic identity (Belz, 2003) .
- At higher levels of proficiency, in a study of code-switching behaviour in a FL context in Canada, researchers found that alternating two languages within a single conversation or utterance is a characteristic feature of bilinguals' speech, not a deficiency (Liebsher and Dailey-O'Cain, 2004).
- Advanced learners as multi-competent rather than deficient?
- “English only” so strongly supported within Western methodological traditions to protect the status of the native-speaker teacher & in so doing, support neo-colonial control? (Littlewood & Yu, 2009)



## In summary,

- Continue to encourage an English only approach in our ELICOS classrooms and make our rationale explicit from the start
- Need to remember our students are adults who have their own identities and their L1 is part of that identity
- There may be some benefits in their use of their L1
- While we keep encouraging the use of English only, it should not be an imposition, but a good humoured approach which respects their rights as multicompetent individuals

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