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Iranian EFL university learners and lecturers’ attitude towards translation as a tool in reading comprehension considering background variables of age, major and years of experience

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Abstract: This study was conducted to examine the Iranian EFL university learners’ and lecturers’ attitude towards translation as a tool in reading comprehension. A sample of 50 male and female students of Nursing, Medicine and 10 male and female lecturers at the Shiraz University of Medical Sciences were randomly selected. Using an Oxford Placement Test (OPT), the students in each field were homogenized. Two different questionnaires were administered. In the students’ questionnaire, items were about the functions of L1 in terms of translating in the EFL/ESL classroom based on, and the lecturers’ questionnaire included items about their attitudes towards L1 use in reading comprehension classes. It came to light that students of different age and major did not differ widely in their attitudes towards using translation in reading nor did lecturers differ in their opinions regarding the application of translation. Moreover, the results supported the effectiveness of using translation activities in L2 classrooms to improve student’s reading comprehension. This research is motivated by studies that suggest the use of L1 in ESL/EFL classroom can facilitate rather than impede target language learning.

Subjects: Teaching of Reading; Teachers & Teacher Education; Classroom Practice; Teaching & Learning; Translation & Interpretation; Language Teaching & Learning

Keywords: translation; reading comprehension; learners’ attitude; lecturers’ attitude

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

One challenging case in EFL educational settings is the use of translation in the classroom. Different pros and cons have been offered by various experts in the field for the use of translation as a tool in reading comprehension. By recruiting a sample of students from different fields and homogenizing them through Oxford Placement Test and another sample of lecturers, a study was run which revealed that respondents of different age, major and experience did not differ widely in their views about the use of translation as a tool in reading comprehension. The study indicated that teachers mostly had positive views on using L1 in teaching L2 reading texts.
1. Introduction

A number of studies have considered the attitudes and perceptions of participants toward the L1 use in the classroom (Aryadoust & Shahsavar, 2016; Dash, 2002; Schweers, 1999). Similarly, when it comes to the context of Iran, the use of L1 and FL among Iranian EFL students is subject to controversy. For example, Siah-Chashm (1995) concludes that the failure of the learners in learning the target language is due to the use of mother tongue, while Nazary (2008) recommends the use of L1 (Persian) and translation as a technique in EFL classes. It seems that some teachers and students in Iran are completely confused regarding the use of their mother tongue, Persian, in EFL courses, and sometimes EFL teachers are too demotivated to even have the tendency to run the whole class in L2 especially in high schools (Khojasteh et al., 2018; Sharifzadeh & Khojasteh, 2018). According to the related literature, very few studies have been carried out so far, dealing with L1 use, especially at the university level in Iran. Moreover, some research studies in the realm of the learners’ perceptions have resulted in contradictory conclusions and few of them have been run for both teachers’ and learners’ perceptions in the university context. Due to these confusions, the present researchers were prompted to embark on a study on Iranian university students’ and teachers’ perceptions to determine whether or not using L1 would be facilitative or debilitative in FL reading classes.

Attitude can be defined as a psychological tendency to view a particular object or behavior with a degree of favor or disfavor. According to Shahsavar and Tan (2012) students’ perception toward a language is one of the directing predictors of success in learning it. As a result, teachers and educators should regard both perception and attitude as important factors when they plan to design English language training and instruction. However, negative perception can impede learning a language; it can be changed and transformed to positive ones and facilitate getting a positive result (Ellis, 2006). Furthermore, many researches indicate that one of the problems is that some EFL learners believe when they are not allowed to express their opinions in Persian, they will experience fear, insecurity, and low self-esteem. As a result, these students may not be able to participate well in the learning process. Consequently, the primary purpose of the present study was to investigate the attitude of lecturers and learners towards the use of L1 in reading classes. It is believed that the findings give deeper insight into why they use their mother tongue in their English reading classes instead of using English.

In spite of the abandonment of translation, as a pedagogical tool in teaching a foreign language, by many language practitioners, second language (L2) learners inevitably use it as a viable learning strategy. The utility of translation as a teaching technique in L2 classes has a long history and has always been the core of the controversies regarding whether or not it would be used as a valid and effective tool in foreign language teaching/learning process.

In the last few decades, there has been an increasing interest in the translation practice in the foreign language classroom. It seems now that the general attitude towards translation has begun to change. Recently, foreign language teachers have been reconsidering the use of translation for different learning purposes. It was observed that translation activity could be used for pedagogical purposes along with other traditional language teaching activities. Reading, grammar exercises, translation, etc., “are in fact perceived by learners to be conductive to learning” (McDonough, 2002, p. 409) and reading, translation, spelling and grammar have been accentuated in EFL contexts (Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeini, 2011).

The act of translating can create an ideal learning opportunity with positive L1 use in FL learning. Vygotsky (1986) believes that the process of reading is a kind of changing words into sense and inner speech; of his idea is a translation of words into thought. The concepts of scaffolding and zone of proximal development (ZPD) have become outstanding ideas in socio-cultural theory because within them is embedded a psycho-social model of teaching and learning.
It seems that the point which requires special attention is the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students as the key players of FL classes towards using L1. As Prodromou (2002) reports, students at higher levels of study have a negative attitude and lower students had more tendency toward the use of L1 in their classroom. As such, EFL learners’ attitude toward using L1 seems to be of great importance in FL learning context.

2. Review of literature

2.1. The role of translation in L2 reading comprehension

Translation is perceived differently by different linguists, methodologists and teachers. Its use in foreign language teaching provokes a great deal of disagreement and criticism. The main reason for this is the fact that throughout the years there have been a number of studies carried out, which have either favored or completely ignored the use of translation as a learning method. On the one hand, after the fall of Grammar Translation Method, proponents of the Direct Method at the end of the nineteenth century banned the use of translation activities in the process of L2 learning. They believed in an approach called “Monolingual Approach”. On the other hand, proponents of “Bilingual Approach” acknowledged the use of L1 and translation as a pedagogical tool in teaching foreign languages. The problem with the later approach, however, is that the supporters of using translation activities tend to somehow overuse it, which, as some experts in the field believe, will naturally reduce the amount of students’ exposure to L2 (Dujmović, 2014). Besides these two positions, there could still be another position standing somewhere in between the two extremes of the continuum (Nation, 2003).

Several studies have demonstrated the teacher’s attitudes toward the use of L1 in L2 classes in different contexts. Alshmmari (2011) conducted a research on the use of Arabic in EFL classes at two technical colleges to examine the attitudes of teachers and their purposes for using Arabic in EFL classrooms. The study showed that the mother tongue was used by majority of teachers and both students and teachers had positive views toward L1 use in English classes. In addition, the researcher added that a balanced and careful use of Arabic in L2 classes seems not to affect the students’ exposure to the target language, and it can even be useful in the learning process and may be needed for increasing the learner’s comprehension.

Dujmović (Bhoot et al., 2014) carried out a similar research in the Croatian context. The data were collected through questionnaires. The findings showed students’ emphasis on translation of some words, complex ideas, or even the whole passage as a suitable way to learn a foreign language. The teachers believed that Croatian can be used to make the comprehension check and to make sure students have understood the text. He asserted that in the EFL classes Croatian plays a supportive and facilitating role.

Another similar study was carried out on teachers’ code switching to the L1 in EFL classes in three Chinese universities by Jingxia (2010). The data collection was based on qualitative and quantitative research method consisting of two questionnaires and classroom recordings. The result showed that code switching to Chinese does exist in the EFL classes of Chinese universities. Moreover, most teachers (80%) hold a positive view on teachers’ code switching to the L1.

As far as the use of L1 in Iranian context is concerned, Afzal (2013) conducted a research on using of L1 in EFL as a way of scaffolding for both students and teachers to learn and teach English. Based on the findings of this study the majority of teachers used L1 in L2 classes. The main reasons for the use of L1 were the translation of some words, complex ideas or even the whole passage. Although the study revealed that in the EFL classes Persian plays a supportive and facilitating role.

Another research was carried out by Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) on the use of Persian in the pre-university level in Iran. The results showed the positive tendency of students toward L2
dominance in L2 classes. On the contrary, Nazary's (2008) study of a group of Tehran university students showed that Iranian university students are reluctant to use L1 in L2 classes on the grounds that any minute of using L1 will diminish a minute of their exposure to L2. Similarly, the participants of this study highlighted that in the context of English learning in Iran, where students are solely exposed to L2 in English classes, L1 should be used as little as possible.

Nation (2003) called this approach as “Balanced Approach”. He believes that a balanced approach is needed, which sees a role for the L1 but also recognizes the importance of maximizing L2 use in the classroom. As Cook (2001) also believes, translation activities used in the process of L2 teaching can be viewed as a rich resource which, if used judiciously, can assist second language teaching and learning. Therefore, this research study tries to open up a new horizon for English instructors to find a thoughtful way to use translation activities in the process of second language teaching.

Some researchers supported the foresaid idea. For example, Khajavifar (1995) contended that though translation is suggested to be applied as a means only and not as an end, it is strongly recommended that it should be used as an end for specific purposes. However, Carreres (2006) put forward an argument against using L1 as a language teaching tool by stating that translation is an artificial exercise that has no position in communicative methodology.

It is also a widely held view that translation is not a suitable exercise in the initial stages of teaching (Muranoi, 2000). It is argued that, before learners can tackle translation productively, they need to have acquired a significant level of proficiency in the L2. They need to have moved beyond beginner’s level.

Many theorists, linguists, and teachers, on the other hand, agree on the importance of using translation in foreign language classes. Atkinson (1987), for example, is one of the first and chief advocates of using translation technique in the communicative classroom. In his article, Atkinson clearly states that translation from mother language to the target language which emphasizes a recently taught language item is a means to reinforce structural, conceptual and sociolinguistic differences between the native and target languages. In his view, even though this activity is not communicative, it aims at improving the accuracy of the newly learned structures. The proponents of using translation technique in L2 instruction claim that the use of translation activities not only has a positive effect on students’ second language learning but also may help them improve the way they learn the target language. G. Cook (2007), for example, asserts that treating translation technique as a classroom resource opens up a number of ways to use it, such as for teachers to convey meaning, explain grammar, and organize the class, and for students to use as part of their collaborative learning and individual strategy use. “The first language can be a useful element in creating authentic L2 uses rather than something to be shunned at all costs” (p. 185). Moreover, Oxford and Ehrman (1988, as cited in Marzban et al., 2012) maintained that translation and comprehension of texts without a dictionary can promote ambiguity tolerance.

All second language learners access their L1 while processing the L2 (G. Cook, 2007). She suggests that “the L2 user does not effectively switch off the L1 while processing the L2, but has it constantly available” (p. 571). She also maintains that when working with ESL learners, teachers must not treat the L2 in isolation from the L1. In fact, according to Cook, one cannot do so because “L1 is present in the L2 learners' minds, whether the teacher wants it to be there or not. The L2 knowledge, being created in them, is connected in all sorts of ways with their L1 knowledge” (p. 584). Thus, one might suppose that using L1, more specifically translation activities, in L2 instruction will lead to negative transfer. However, Beardsmore (1993) believes that although it may appear contrary to common sense, maintaining and developing one’s native language does not interfere with the developing of the second language proficiency. To him, experience shows that many people around the world become fully bi-and multi-lingual without suffering interference from one language in the learning of the other.
In 2006, Carreres decided to conduct a questionnaire which led her to the conclusion that learners overwhelmingly perceive translation exercises as useful for language learning. Consequently, it was in response to student feedback that she decided to introduce translation more substantially in language classes. She added that translation, by its very nature, is an activity that invites discussion and students are only too happy to contribute to it, often defending their version with remarkable passion and persuasiveness.

Leonardi (2011) states that translation as a pedagogical tool can be successfully employed at any level of proficiency, at school or University, as a valuable and creative teaching aid to support, integrate and further strengthen the four traditional language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. One of the clear advantages of using translation as a technique in EFL classes can be the improvement of the students’ perception of reading comprehension passages. According to Kabilan et al. (2010), it is a dynamic, cognitive and interactive process. It is not merely a process of decoding of codes in printed form, but a process of creating meaning as a result of the transaction between the reader and the text. Hsieh (2000) conducted a research to understand attitudes and thoughts toward translation, with 52 Taiwanese college students at the end of one year of EFL instruction using a translation method. The results showed that 85% expressed that translating helps pay attention to the coherence and contextualization of English reading tasks, 73% learned the importance of their native language, 65% became more aware of multiple meanings of an English word, 65% became more aware of multiple meanings of an English word, 62% extended their vocabulary knowledge and reading skills.

Translation plays a facilitation role in understanding or analytical processing of text and background knowledge recall (Floyd & Carrell, 1987). Learners have to conceptualize their text reading comprehension like the writer of the text to understand the L2 text. Then, they can concentrate to apply their L2 even L1 lexical, syntactic, and semantic and background knowledge due to comprehending the L2 text lexicon, syntactic and information presented in the task (Yanguas, 2009). Also, for the EFL learners, the need to process L2 reading texts makes them naturally apply capabilities of their L1 conceptual processing, by mental translation, from L1 to L2 (Newmark, 1995). They may take a kind of co-conception adjustment through both L1 competences and L2 inputs to avoid misunderstanding during reading. The language threshold hypothesis describes this as reading process transfer from L1 to L2 reading (Cummins, 1979). This collaborative cognitive process is being done in syntactic complex parts of the texts and during cognitive processing in L2. Learners also apply translation strategy on reading as whether to get the meaning of special contexts or because of memory overload (Kern, 1994). Learners’ capabilities in the application of L1 translation in these occasions can be interpreted as their resilience to overcome probable misunderstanding stresses (Karimi & Veisi, 2016).

Iranian ESP reading comprehension learners cannot benefit from their resilience because various impediments including their L2 reading proficiency, the negative impacts of shortage in L2 vocabulary, pain taking and time-consuming process of L2 reading comprehension, and not being able to decipher the hidden meaning of the text they are covering (Karimi & Veisi, 2016). Most of the learners lose their concentration on the content of the message facing with complex sentences. The learners’ psychological conditions are not so clear for EFL teachers and curriculum designers to make analysis of the learners’ capabilities and to find their avoidance to go furthermore proficient. Saffarzadeh (1981) in her introduction to the English books published by SAMT asserted that “developing translation knowledge is a must for ESP learners” (p. 3), and Shahini (1988) in his needs assessment for EFL and ESP courses at Shiraz University found that Iranian ESP learners require translation, reading, and writing skills more than other language skills and components in the academic domain. Other scholars (Amiri, 2000; Khoramshahi, 2015) also confirmed the very needs following the needs analyses they did in this regard. Hence, translating the ESP texts is another problem to which Iranian EFL learners are frequently encountered.

The real problem starts when the students have to strive with some technical very long texts during their university life. This may be partially deserved by the fact that instructors do not
provide their students with different skills and strategies needed to succeed in their reading comprehension targets (Amiri & Maftoon, 2010; Karizak & Khojasteh, 2016). During such classes, as Huang et al. (2009) discuss, “some more skillful students will obtain the required reading skills by themselves, while other less skillful ones will lose their faith and interest in the course and as a result they appeal to the translation variety of their texts in order to pass the exams” (p. 22). Although reading comprehension is a vital part of these exams, students usually do not obtain any instruction on reading skills necessary to read some difficult texts in their teaching life (Huang et al., 2009).

Accordingly, translation in foreign language classes can set a useful ground by which ample opportunities are provided for the students to view language as a holistic system with unique communicative capabilities, no matter what proficiency level they are in. Moreover, translation activities need not be used in isolation but should be included in an inherent part of the language learning course.

In Iran, the mother tongue, Persian, is the formal language of education and the major part of Iranian students’ education is carried out in the Persian language. All students do their primary education in their mother tongue. If these students could be given an early exposure to the English language, they may confront lots of problems. For example, how learners acquire reading comprehension effectively and efficiently is a demanding issue. EFL learners need to comprehend reading better to speak fluently. Although there are numerous reading strategies, many teachers use some of the tasks like pre-reading, post-reading and FL negotiation in their reading classrooms as a scaffolding tool or they may ask students to memorize the texts; however, it seems that these techniques are not always more effective than translation. Therefore, the challenging problem is to consider whether translation use in EFL learning and teaching is a facilitating or debilitating tool.

However, the point which requires special attention is the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students as the key players of FL classes towards using the L1 language process.

According to Ellis (1994, p. 19), “It is widely acknowledged that the role of the mother tongue in foreign language learning is a negative one”. Furthermore, Butzkamm (2008) states that in many Asian countries, there is increasing pressure on English instructors to instruct through English only. From personal experience, having lived and taught in Asia for the last eight years, this is an accurate assessment. In fact, many learning establishments insist on instructing through an L2 policy only, and failure to do so may lead to complaints against the instructor. Cook (2001) supports Ellis and admits that the use of the first language is often viewed in a negative way, whilst instructing through L2 only is seen as positive. In fact, Gill (2005) makes a valid point that teachers often feel guilty when using the first language, as there is often a taboo attached to any classroom use. However, despite all of the negativity, Macaro (2001) insists that research has failed to demonstrate that the total exclusion of L1 has improved the learning of L2. As mentioned previously, many learning institutes and indeed instructors often insist on a complete ban of the mother tongue from the classroom.

However, the reality of the foreign language classroom is not always so straightforward. In fact, Deller and Rinvolucri (2002) hold the view that any attempt to ban the first language is not practical, as in the author's opinion; there is a positive role to be played. According to Cook (2001), over 80% of modern language instructors use L1 even for grammar instruction. Butzkamm (2008) holds the view that foreign language theory needs to have a total turnaround to show that the mother tongue can be a great asset and teaching aid. However, Krashen (1996) is in total disagreement and maintains that anytime L1 is used, it deprives learners the chance to use L2; therefore, the target language is not maximized. Larrea (2002) argues that banning L1 forces students to think in L2; however, it is unlikely that the majority of learners often think in the target language. This viewpoint is also shared by Prodromou (2002) with the author maintaining that any attempts to completely banish L1 will fail because if students are not speaking in L1, they will almost certainly be thinking in the mother tongue. Baker (1996) insists on a total ban of L1, along
with Turnbull (2001); however, the authors do not say as to how this can be achieved. Therefore, if the mother tongue cannot be eliminated, it should be used in a positive, albeit limited way in order to benefit the learning process as the swing of the pendulum has shifted towards learning (Kashefian-Naeeini & Maarof, 2010).

Furthermore, in Cook’s (2001) experience a majority of students frequently use dictionaries for translation, and when asked maintain that it is easier to learn grammar through using some L1, rather than using L2 only. This viewpoint is supported by Celik (2008), who believes that there is much potential for learners to be more efficient at English grammar when learning the rules and structures with the help of the first language. However, clear rules and guidelines for learners and educators would need to be put in place, so as to avoid overuse of the mother tongue.

Butzkamm (2008) believes that the mother tongue can play a positive part in the learning process if used at appropriate moments, with a clear purpose, depending on age, level, etc. However, Gill (2005) insists that overuse and unplanned use have a totally negative impact. The author provides an example of a Slovak teacher going to London to observe a French lesson and was surprised to observe that only seven words of French were used. This would appear to be a reason why many learning institutes insist on an L2 policy only. According to Schweers (1999) using a little L1 in L2 classes shows learners that two languages can coexist; therefore, encouraging students to learn more L2, although it is essential that there is moderate and planned use only, to avoid overuse. This viewpoint is backed up by Auerbach (1993) who maintains that starting with the first language relaxes students, allowing them to gain confidence, resulting in learners being less intimidated. Prodromou (1992) believes that there is much potential to use L1 to help learning L2 but the mother tongue must be used sparingly. However, other authors such as Polio and Duff (1994) are not in favor of any L1 use, and insist on a total ban, although the authors fail to put forward any strategy as to how any possible ban could be enforced. Jones (2010) is in favor of a limited role rather than a total ban of the mother tongue and insists that the majority of published research supports this viewpoint. On the basis of the above, the main goal of the present study is to examine the Iranian EFL university learners and lecturers’ attitude towards translation as a tool in reading comprehension.

According to Zhang and Liu (2016) the mindsets of translators have an effect on translation variation. Likewise, there are various factors which may influence individuals’ attitudes towards translation. Among these factors are the background variables of major, age and work experience which are incorporated in the present study. Similarly, Kruger and Crots (2014) emphasize age and experience as two factors which may play a role in the translation process.

Translation plays a facilitating role for comprehending or analytical processing of text and background knowledge retain (Floyd & Carrell, 1987). Students have to realize their text reading comprehension like the writer of the text to comprehend the L2 text. Then, they focus on applying their L2 even L1 lexical, syntactic, and semantic and background knowledge due to comprehending the L2 text lexicon, syntactic and information presented in the task (Yanguas, 2009).

Moreover, for the EFL learners, the need to process L2 reading texts makes them naturally use capabilities of their L1 conceptual processing, by mental translation, from L1 to L2 (Newmark, 1995). They may take a kind of co-conception adjustment through both L1 competences and L2 inputs to prevent misunderstanding during reading. The language threshold hypothesis explains this as reading process transfer from L1 to L2 reading (Cummins, 1979). This collaborative cognitive process is being done in syntactic complex parts of the texts and during cognitive processing in L2. Learners also apply translation strategy on reading as whether to get the meaning of special contexts to handle the syntactic complexities or due to memory overload (Kern, 1994); accordingly, students’ capabilities in the application of L1 translation in these occasions can be interpreted as their resilience to overcome probable misunderstanding stresses (Karimi & Veisi, 2016).
Accordingly, based on different research results, any attempt to restrict the first language is not rational, despite different drawbacks which may be seen in applying L1 translation in order to enhance learners’ L2 reading comprehension. According to Cook (2001), over 80% of modern language instructors use L1 even for grammar instruction.

Considering the above-mentioned information provided in the literature review, the researchers of the present study seek to answer four research questions regarding the role translation activities play in foreign language teaching:

2.2. Research Questions
(1) Does selected EFL learners’ age influence their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

(2) Does selected EFL learners’ major affect their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

(3) Does selected EFL lecturers’ age have any impacts on their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

(4) Does selected EFL lecturers’ years of experience exert any influence over their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

3. Methodology
3.1. Participants
To reach the purpose of the study, a sample of 50 male and female students of Nursing and 9 lecturers at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences (SUMS) were randomly selected. All lecturers graduated in TEFL. The learners’ homogeneity was tested by an Oxford Placement Test (OPT). The students are eighteen to twenty-five years old and the lecturers are thirty to fifty five years age.

3.2. Instruments
In order to collect data two questionnaires were administered. The researcher surveyed EFL learners’ and lecturers’ general beliefs about using translation in learning and teaching reading texts. These questionnaires had three parts: personal background, guidance, and questions.

In students’ questionnaire, there were 15 items about the functions of L1 in terms of translating in the EFL/ESL classroom based on (Bhooth et al., 2014; Tang, 2002). Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of occurrence on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree).

The lecturers’ questionnaire included 15 items about their attitudes towards L1 use in reading comprehension classes. It was adopted from Rabani et al. (2014). The choices which were respectively used in the questionnaire were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. Both lecturers and students’ questionnaires are provided in the appendix.

3.3. Data collection procedures
To accomplish the purpose of the present study, the following procedures were carried out. First, by administering an OPT, the selected sample’s homogeneity was tested. Second, in order to gauge the participants’ opinions and attitudes toward the usefulness of translation activities in their reading comprehension classes, the researchers provided the participants with a well-organized questionnaire. Giving some explanation on the reason the questionnaire was used, and some instruction on how to answer the questions, the researchers asked participants to complete the questionnaire. The questions were all multiple choices and focused on the subjects’ opinions towards translation. Therefore, the participants were asked to choose from among five possible
choices, based on the Likert Scale (i.e., completely agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, completely disagree), the best one that is in line with their personal opinion.

It should be stated that the questionnaires were piloted on a sample group of five lecturers and five students to ensure the clarity of the items. The data obtained from the questionnaire which included 15 items in students’ and 15 items in lecturers’ questionnaires were analyzed by assigning the values 1 to 5 to the choices they made. Having scored the administrated questionnaires, the researcher analyzed the data through statistical procedures.

4. Data analysis

In order to statistically analyze and interpret the results of the questionnaire given to both students and lecturers, the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was of great help in this research. Quantitative data resulting from the questionnaire responses were analyzed with Independent samples t-test which examines the relationships between learners’ and lecturers’ attitudes towards translation in reading comprehension classes. The quantitative analysis of the two sets questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics like df, means and standard deviations were calculated to conclude the participants’ and lecturers’ responses to the questionnaires and provide a basis to address four research questions.

5. Results

5.1. The first research question
1. Does selected EFL learners’ age influence their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

The first research question aimed to address the learners’ attitudes towards translation in reading comprehension classes. Table 1 shows the details of the data obtained for this purpose. In order to answer this question, independent samples t-test was conducted. As it is conspicuous from the table, Learners’ age did not have any effects on their attitudes towards using translation in reading comprehension classes (P. Value > 0.05).

5.2. The second research question
2. Does selected EFL learners’ major affect their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

In this study, the participants’ major was also included as one of the background variables. Hence, the second research question of this study investigates the relationship between EFL learners’ attitudes towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms and their major. In order to answer this research question, independent samples t-test was performed. Based on the results shown in Table 2, t was equal to 1.270 with df 48. It can be inferred from the results presented in Table 2 that learners’ major did not have any effects on their attitudes towards using translation in reading comprehension classes (P. Value > 0.05).

5.3. The third research question
3. Does selected EFL lecturers’ age has any impacts on their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

| Table 1. T-test for learners’ attitudes by age |
|---------------------------------------------|
| Age     | N   | Mean  | Std. deviation | t     | df  | sig   |
|----------|-----|-------|----------------|-------|-----|-------|
| Totalscore| Under 22 | 46 | 53.5217 | 9.95934 | 2.004 | 48 | .051 |
|          | Over 22  | 4  | 43.0000 | 11.63329 |      |    |      |
To answer the third research question of this study and to determine whether there was any connection between EFL lecturers’ attitudes towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms considering their age, independent samples t-test was performed. Based on the results shown in Table 3 it could be claimed that lecturers’ age did not have any effects on their attitudes towards using translation in reading comprehension classes (P. Value>0.05).

5.4. The fourth research question
4. Does selected EFL lecturers’ years of experience exert any influence over their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

To answer the fourth research question of this study, independent samples t-test was run and the results (t = 1.038), (df = 7) and (Std. Deviation = 6.18466) indicated that lecturers’ years of experience did not have any effects on their attitudes towards using translation in reading comprehension classes (P. Value>0.05). The results are illustrated in Table 4.

5.5. The results of individual items analysis
Individual items of the questionnaires were also analyzed and interesting results were obtained. For instance, it was illuminated that most of the lecturers confirmed that when Persian is used while teaching reading comprehension texts, learners’ comprehension will be facilitated. In addition, it was found that the application of Persian in teaching reading comprehension texts augments learner’s achievement in reading comprehension tests. Lecturers’ Attitudes about the effects of L1 use on the promotion of reading comprehension and their views regarding the use of L1 in learners’ achievement in reading comprehension are shown in figures 1 and 2, respectively.

6. Findings and discussions
6.1. Does selected EFL learners’ age influence their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?
The two extreme positions of pure translation and forbidding translation in the classroom have been the topic of most of the studies conducted on the impact of translation technique on the second or foreign language learning/teaching.

The first research question of the study explored the relationship between EFL learners’ attitudes towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms and their age. Attitude as one of the individual differences found very effective in the quality of teaching and learning as reflected by Kafipour et al. (2010). The students were asked to complete a questionnaire on general beliefs about using translation in understanding reading texts. This questionnaire had three parts: personal background, guidance, and questions.
| Experience | N   | Mean  | Std. deviation | T  | df | Sig  |
|------------|-----|-------|----------------|----|----|------|
| Under 10  | 4   | 49.25 | 6.18           | 1.038 | 7  | .334 |
| Over 10   | 5   | 55.2  | 9.96           | 5.2 | 9.999 | .000 |
To measure the effects of age on learners’ attitudes towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms, first they were divided into two age groups (under 22 and above 22). Then, so as to measure any possible difference in the mean scores of the age groups, independent samples t-test was conducted. The analysis of results is shown in Table 1. Independent samples t-test was used due to the definition of different parts in 5-point Likert-scale with one being “strongly disagree and five being ‘strongly agree’. In this study all in all, the results indicated there was no significant relationship between the learners’ age and their attitude towards using translation in reading comprehension classes (P. Value >0.05). And students at any age perceived the use of translation in the reading classroom as useful because they believed it helped them understand difficult grammar points, instructions and new concepts. This finding is in line with that of Kashefian-Naeini and Riazi (2011) who reported that learners’ age did not exert any influence on their beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, the findings indicated that the use of students’ L1 in the EFL reading classroom had a facilitating role rather than impeding. This finding is in line with the findings of other studies (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Tang, 2002) in the contexts of Australia, Saudi, and China. These studies revealed that students use and prefer their teachers to use L1 for targeted purposes. The finding also suggests that the use of Persian may usefully serve social and cognitive functions, including scaffolding, and promoting collaborative work to improve language learning. Using L1 highlighted in some other studies as one of the strategies to learn language in general and vocabulary in specific. Supporting the findings, a research was carried out by Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) on
the use of Persian in pre-university level in Iran. The results showed the positive tendency of students toward L2 dominance in L2 classes.

6.2. Does selected EFL learners’ major affect their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

In this study, the participants’ major was also included as one of the background variables. First, the participants were divided into two groups (graduate students/Medical students and undergraduate students/Nursing students). When the means of students in different majors was compared considering their attitudes toward using translation in reading comprehension classes through independent samples t-test, it was found that there wasn’t any significant difference between their attitudes towards translation. In the researcher’s humble opinion, translation of texts especially medical terms is necessary all the time, but, there are some situations when it is absolutely a must for every teacher. For example, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is defined as a mental health condition where a person has obsessive thoughts and compulsive behavior. The word “obsession” usually describes something enjoyable, but in OCD the obsession is unpleasant and frightening. It's almost impossible for the students to understand this long definition and get the required meaning. So, the Persian translation for OCD (يركفساوسولالتخا) is the ideal solution to take the learners out of this dilemma. Another example is when the students took the word abortion for miscarriage. Abortion is the mother’s murdering of an infant, or terminating the pregnancy by medical ways in cases like rape or some other medical reasons. Miscarriage is the spontaneous body’s removal of the embryo or fetus with no outside influence because of either a problem with the fetus itself, a hormonal imbalance, a woman falling from the stairs, etc. So, the same word for both cases in Persian is (سدطچرئین). In this case, the teacher’s interpretation would remove students’ confusion.

Some researchers also agreed with this idea (Khajavifar, 1995) stated that “Although translation is recommended to be used as a means only and not as an end, it is strongly advised that it should be used as an end for specific purposes”. However, Carreres (2006) put forward an argument against using L1 as a language teaching tool by stating that “Translation is an artificial exercise that has no place in communicative methodology”.

Although as Prodromou (2002) reports, students at higher levels of study have a negative attitude and lower students had more tendency toward the use of L1 in their classroom. However, in this study, it is quite evident from the feedback of the questionnaire that translation is a facilitating tool in this aspect from the point of view of both Medical and Nursing students.

6.3. Does selected EFL lecturers’ age has any impacts on their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

To determine whether there was any connection between EFL lecturers’ attitudes towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms considering their age, the lecturers were asked to complete a questionnaire on general beliefs about using translation in understanding reading texts.

Independent samples t-test was performed. Based on the results it could be claimed that there was no significant relationship between the EFL lecturers’ attitudes considering their age towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms (P. Value>0.05).

Supporting the findings, several studies have demonstrated the teacher’s attitudes toward the use of L1 in L2 classes in different contexts. Alshmmari (2011) conducted a research on the use of Arabic in Saudi EFL classes at two Saudi technical colleges to examine the attitudes of teachers and their purposes for using Arabic in EFL classrooms. The study showed that the mother tongue was used by majority of teachers and both students and teachers had positive views toward L1 use in English classes. In addition, the researcher added that a balanced and careful use of Arabic in L2 classes seems not to affect the students’ exposure to the target language, and it can even be useful in the learning process and may be needed for increasing the learner’s comprehension.
On the contrary, it is also a widely held view that translation is not a suitable exercise in the initial stages of teaching (Muranoi, 2000). It is argued that, before learners can tackle translation productively, they need to have acquired a significant level of proficiency in the L2. They need to have moved beyond beginner’s level.

Teacher’s use of Persian in the classroom might be due to the fact that sometimes students—because of their low proficiency level in English—can’t follow them when they only use English to explain the meaning of the text or to give instructions. Also, when teachers know an appropriate Persian translation of an English sentence, they will give it to students so they can immediately comprehend the meaning of the English sentence. This also helps them to increase their self-confidence in answering the question. The use of some Persian in the class actually provides more time for students to practice their English and get exposure to English. Occasionally, when you spend quite some time or use several English sentences to explain one word or idea and the students still look confused, using one simple Persian word or idiom might solve the problem.

6.4. Does selected EFL lecturers’ years of experience exert any influence over their attitudes towards using translation in reading classrooms?

To measure the effects of years of experience on lecturers’ attitudes towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms, the lecturers were asked to complete a questionnaire on general beliefs about using translation in understanding reading texts. Results revealed that there wasn’t significant relationship between EFL lecturers’ attitudes towards using translation in EFL reading classrooms and their years of experience (P. value >0.05).

This study showed that lecturers’ professional experience did not impact their beliefs and attitudes about using translation. In other words, whether they had many years of working experience or they were recently employed, their views and attitudes were not significantly different. This may be due to the fact that meetings are held monthly regarding the best way English language lecturers should tackle their classes in general and reading comprehension classes in particular and they reach a consensus about the way to act in classes. This may lead to a homogeneity of beliefs and attitudes regarding the way to approach their classes.

The results of the present study were in disagreement with those of Kashefian-Naaeini and Riazi (2011) who confirmed that professional experience influenced Individuals’ beliefs and attitudes in an EFL setting. Persian, the mother tongue of Iranians is the formal language of education. All students do their primary education in their mother tongue. If these students could be given an early exposure to the English language, they may confront lots of problems. For example, how learners acquire reading comprehension effectively and efficiently is a demanding issue. EFL learners need to comprehend reading better to speak fluently. Although there are numerous reading strategies, many teachers use some of the tasks like pre-reading, post-reading and FL negotiation in their reading classrooms as a scaffolding tool or they may ask students to memorize the texts; however, it seems that these techniques are not always more effective than translation. Therefore, the challenging problem is to consider whether translation use in EFL learning and teaching is a facilitating or debilitating tool. However, the point which requires special attention is the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and students as the key players of FL classes towards using L1 language process.

According to Cook (2001), over 80% of modern language instructors use L1 for grammar and reading comprehension instruction. Furthermore, in this author’s experience a majority of students frequently use dictionaries for translation, and when asked maintain that it is easier to learn grammar and texts through using some L1, rather than using L2 only. This viewpoint is supported by Celik (2008), who believes that there is much potential for learners to be more efficient at English grammar when learning the rules and structures with the help of the first language. However, clear rules and guidelines for learners and educators would need to be put in place, so as to avoid overuse of the mother tongue.
Leonardi (2011) states that translation as a pedagogical tool can be successfully employed at any level of proficiency, at school or University, as a valuable and creative teaching aid to support, integrate and further strengthen the four traditional language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. One of the clear advantages of using translation as a technique in EFL classes can be the improvement of the students’ perception of reading comprehension passages. Reading is a dynamic, cognitive and interactive process. It is not merely a process of decoding of codes in printed form, but a process of creating meaning as a result of the transaction between the reader and the text (Kabilan et al., 2010, P. 128).

Some researchers believe that the amount of English used depends on the students’ language proficiency level. If their English is at an advanced level, teachers feel no need to use Persian. All in all, teachers think that using some Persian in the classroom is necessary.

Sometimes when students seem perplexed after teacher’s English explanation of certain points, teachers use Persian to reinterpret them to discuss the meaning of some difficult, abstract words and to explain the grammar and ideas expressed in long and complicated sentences. Furthermore, when the classroom is noisy, using Persian to keep order is more effective than using English. Regarding the lecturers’ and students’ attitudes for the effect of using translation on students’ language skills, most of them believed that using L1 has a facilitating role in learners’ reading comprehension skill.

7. Conclusion
Translation in EFL classroom settings can have beneficial effects in some contexts. The results of the analysis of the two questionnaires on the whole clarified that factors of age and major did not influence students’ attitude towards translation neither did the factors of years of experience nor age exert any impacts on lecturers’ views about using translation in reading comprehension classes. Moreover, analysis of individual questionnaire items revealed that translation can enhance learners’ comprehension of text and boost their achievement. Likewise, the study indicated that teachers mostly had positive views on using L1 in teaching L2 reading texts. The study provided a detailed description and analysis of teacher’s general attitudes and their reasons for using L1 in EFL classrooms. The beneficial role of L1 in creating a nonthreatening environment in the classrooms, enhancing the learners’ motivation and interest in learning language, increasing their involvement and achievement in the learning process and conveying the meaning of new words and idioms were the teachers’ main reasons for using Persian in teaching L2 reading texts. Although no generalizations could be made from this single study, it does reveal the variety of teachers’ beliefs about the use of L1 in teaching L2 reading comprehension texts. The complexity of the L1 issue has illustrated the value and importance of investigating the issues, and more qualitative and quantitative studies need to be undertaken to deepen our understanding of teacher beliefs about the use of L1 in teaching L2 reading texts.

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Appendix

(Questionnaires)

Dear student,

This questionnaire is meant to explore your attitude towards translation as a tool in reading comprehension. To this end your careful completion of the questionnaire will definitely contribute to obtaining accurate data and arriving at valid conclusions. Therefore, please check the box, which best describes your attitudes. Thank you very much in advance for your time and cooperation. Please also specify your biographical information below:

| Name         | نام            |
|--------------|----------------|
| Gender       | جنسیت         |
| Age          | سن             |
| Major        | رشته نیتی          |

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| Question                                                                 | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| From being a native speaker of English, I find a translation task to be a challenge. I am interested in translation, that is, using Persian for learning English. | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق |
| Translation classes are useful and enjoyable.                          | متفق             | متفق     | متفق     | متفق   | متفق |
| Using translation, I made progress in learning English texts.          | متفق             | متفق     | متفق     | متفق   | متفق |
| While answering reading comprehension questions, my teacher's translation increases my self-confidence. | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق |
| When my teacher uses first language (Persian), I will be familiar with the culture of people of L2 (English). | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق |
| The use of Persian translation while reading English texts helps me to better remember reading comprehension texts later. | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق | متفق |
| Translation activities are among appropriate learning strategies in an English class. | متفق             | متفق     | متفق     | متفق   | متفق |
| When I am asked to directly think in English, I feel anxious.          | متفق             | متفق     | متفق     | متفق   | متفق |

(Continued)
| Questions | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|-----------|----------|-----------|-------|---------------|
| 9         | نتایج خوب را نیم گیاه کنید چه یه صورت غیرفیزی و چه یه صورت غیرفیزی اثر نسبتی را درک نمی‌دهید. Translation of important parts of a text either oral or written can have a positive effect on my reading comprehension. |
| 10        | استفاده گاهآ و سعی‌گاه از زبان فارسی نظریه‌شناسی در مورد کلاژکری انگلیشی نیز که علوم تهیه نکن. Using Persian frequently, I will have a positive idea regarding learning English. |
| 11        | در بسی اوقات بدین نتایج نیم‌گیاه از زبان انگلیسی را فراموش می‌نمایم. In some stages, I can’t learn English without translation to Persian. |
| 12        | استفاده علوم از زبان فارسی یه نیز راز لنک بی از ان که لنک بی از ان روی انگلیسی را راز نگم. The use of teacher of Persian language helps me learn Linguistics and meta-discourse markers. |
| 13        | در همه زبان‌ها به ترتیب استفاده از نتایج از نظر فیزیک. In all language skills, translation should be used. |
| 14        | نتایج به اهمیت زبان و اصطلاحات انگلیسی به نیز لک کرده. Translation helps me in comprehending lexical items and English expressions. |
| 15        | وقتی چنین دائم یه انگلیسی سیرست بتوان است اینجا دام از از نقش‌های ترجمه نمی‌کنند. When thinking in English is difficult to me, I tend to use Persian for more comprehension. |
Dear colleague,

This questionnaire is meant to explore your attitude towards translation as a tool in reading comprehension. To this end your careful completion of the questionnaire will definitely contribute to obtaining accurate data and arriving at valid conclusions. Therefore, please check the box, which best describes your attitudes as a professional teacher. The information will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Thank you very much in advance for your time and cooperation. Please specify your biographical information below:

Name:  
Gender:  
Degree:  
Years of teaching experience: 

| QN | Questions                                                                 | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1  | Using L1 is inevitable in teaching reading texts.                         |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 2  | Translation can be used as a teaching/learning strategy in teaching reading texts. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 3  | The use of Persian in teaching reading texts may interfere with learner’s ability to learn English well. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 4  | Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts facilitates learner’s comprehension. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 5  | Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts increases learner’s achievement in reading comprehension tests. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 6  | If students receive translation of the gist in Persian after reading the passage, it has positive effect on their comprehension. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 7  | Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts enhances learners’ involvement in learning process. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 8  | Translation of the text can be used for conveying meaning i.e. checking the meaning of new words, idioms and expressions and sentences in a text. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 9  | L1 can be used in teaching reading comprehension texts to save class time. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 10 | L1 can help students to check whether their comprehension is correct or not. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 11 | Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts changes the environment of the classes from teacher dominant to student centered. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 12 | Translating reading comprehension texts increases interaction between teacher and learners. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 13 | Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts creates non-threatening environment in the classroom. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 14 | Using L1 increases students’ self confidence in answering comprehension questions. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
| 15 | Using L1 in teaching reading comprehension texts enhances student’s motivation and interest for learning. |                |       |                            |          |                   |
