Integrating L1 into Grammar Teaching as a Remedy for Learners' Unresponsiveness in an ESP Classroom: An Action Research

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Abstract

In this study, the researcher had a group of unresponsive learners taking a year-long English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course in Banking and Finance Department. After the detection of the problem, *unresponsiveness*, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with the learners (*N*=8) to find the reasons of it, and what they needed accordingly. Data analysis showed they majorly needed Turkish- (L1), which was restricted to the teaching of grammar as they found most beneficial to their learning. Thus, use of L1 for explicit grammar teaching which proceeded schema building plus implicit inferring was examined to see if and how it remedied their unresponsiveness. Systematic data collection included the learners' end-of-course written reflections (*N*=40) and another round of one-on-one semi-structured interviews (*N*=7) to further elicit their views about teaching grammar through L1. The results revealed positive evaluations regarding the benefits of L1 upon more and better input comprehension, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge development, and awareness regarding language learning. They also reported feeling less anxious and stressed, which encouraged their willingness to communicate and participate. Thus, the results verify judicious role of L1 as a scaffold to decrease affective barriers and increase comprehension in language learning.

Key words: action research, English for Specific Purposes, teaching grammar, unresponsive learners, use of L1

Introduction

Teaching ESP, as a specific approach to language teaching relying on its own methodology and content, aims to equip learners with the knowledge and skills for the field of study they aim and need to be ready for (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In ESP classes, the focus is on the identification of sets of transferable language skills, *often through needs analysis*, located within specific contexts (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). Although ESP teaching relies on its own methodology as an answer to the needs, there is no best way or approach as all methods are a response to a particular group of learners. Therefore, ESP practitioners need to have the ability to assess a situation, then select and adapt their methodology to match learners' needs as "flexibility and willingness to take risks are the name of the game!" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p.187).

In this regard, despite the promotion of English-only classroom in second, foreign, and specific contexts due to the belief that extensive use of English motivates and improves learners' language skills, L1 which is the ultimate source of their background knowledge of the language and its linguistic features cannot be disregarded (Ellis, 1994). Besides, L1 is a mediator in foreign and second language learning for the teaching of speaking, writing, and grammar as learners are known to rely extensively on it as a cognitive, metacognitive, and pedagogical tool (Butzkamm, 2003; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Giacobbe, 1992; Lida, 2014) in diverse contexts, particularly where they are shy, silent, and reluctant. Moreover, "English only in the classroom is neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound" (Auerbach, 1993, p.5) as it may "result in lengthy, complicated, and incomprehensible explanations that add to teacher talking time" (Szendrói, 2010, p. 41). Thus, allowing L1 in language classroom has many benefits such as affecting later success of learning positively by facilitating transition to English, reducing affective barriers, and integrating learners' authentic and out-of-class experiences into learning (Auerbach, 1993). Furthermore, "not making use of both the L1 and L2 in the classroom is a waste of a valuable resource" (Turnbull, 2018, p.55). Hence, L1 has already been used in English language classes,

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and ESP classroom is not an exception, as it facilitates learners' understanding and provides sense of security, better comprehension and progress, higher achievement, and a positive learning atmosphere (Auerbach, 1993; Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Butzkamm, 2003; Usadiati, 2009). L1 also contributes to language skills development, metalinguistic awareness, negotiation of meaning, reduced cognitive overload, lower affective barriers such as anxiety, and higher self-confidence and self-motivation (Berning, 2016; Boustani, 2019; Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Cheng, 2015; Cuartas Alvarez, 2014; Luchini & Rosello, 2007; Usadiati, 2009). Therefore, although "the use of L1 has been gradually viewed less favorably by second language (L2) teaching theorists after the Grammar-Translation Method lost its prominent role" (Du, 2016, p.359), the interest regarding whether to include learners' L1 in teaching has gained recognition and become a persistent research topic particularly after being neglected for many years within the communicative approach beginning in 1970s.

Literature review: Understanding L1 in teaching English

Evidence regarding the difference L1 made in language classrooms exists in international body of literature. L1 is most frequent to the translation of unknown words and explanations of grammar rules which learners have difficulty in comprehending (Jingxia, 2010). In her study upon the role of using L1 (Indonesian) interchangeably with English in explanations of present perfect tense rules and its effect on writing, Usadiati (2009) reports higher success rate (80 %) compared to when it is not used (45 %). In classes where L1 was periodically used to clarify complex terminology, vocabulary and grammar, and to give instructions, learners' overall exam scores more than doubled and their level of anxiety lessened compared to those where L1 was not permitted (Boustani, 2019; Bruen & Kelly, 2014; Miles, 2004; Teng, 2019). Thus, if L1 is not allowed, it causes insecurities and slow improvement, and when allowed, it facilitates learning as it significantly encourages higher learning performance and sense of confidence in a relaxed classroom atmosphere. Additionally, if allowed to use their L1 (Japanese) when collaborating for writing tasks, learners achieved better written L2 output than those who relied on exclusive use of English during collaboration (Berning, 2016). Besides, as an integral component of learners' identity where prior learning and life experiences are encoded, L1 scaffolds L2 learning (Bismilla, 2011). Thus, it is regarded as "the most important ally a foreign language can have" (Buztkamm, 2003, p.30). Madrinan (2014) arrived at similar results as she saw that learners transferred concepts from their L1. As seen, in any level and context, L1 has various functions ranging from facilitating comprehension and better performance of language skills to mediating the transfer of previous learnings to L2 and foreign language.

When it comes to the Turkish context, use of L1 is a controversial issue as there is no standardization. It is still a matter of concern as teachers face "the dilemma of allowing, limiting, or forbidding it" (Yavuz, 2012, p.4340) since "there has been no absolute research outcome that indicates whether it should be avoided at all costs or not" (Timuçin & Baytar, 2015, p.241). Thus, there is "no concrete agreement among teachers and scholars who are involved" (Yürekli Kaynardağ, 2016, p.5) although research suggested including L1 properly and purposefully (Çelik, 2008). In this regard, teachers suggest using L1 only if it is necessary (Yavuz, 2012) or regard it as an inherent segment of language learning as they think that it fulfills such functions as establishing rapport with students, making clarifications, or giving explanations (Paker & Karaağaç, 2015). Similarly, teachers at primary and secondary levels rely on L1 extensively (48.12 %) causing students to receive inadequate L2 input (İnan, 2016). As for the likely reasons of this extensive L1 use, research shows that in secondary schools, it is mainly to transmit the academic content, manage the classroom and maintain its discipline, and establish rapport with students (Salı, 2014). Similarly, in tertiary level, L1 is used to translate, check comprehension, give instructions, explain grammar, manage the class, or for no obvious reason like random code-switching (Timuçin & Baytar, 2015). Besides, its use in preparatory classes in tertiary level is seen to make a difference in grammar teaching (Uyar, 2012). Similarly, significant evidence of syntactic transfer on the acquisition of verb placement is reported (Mede, Tutal, Ayaz, Çalışır, & Akın, 2014). Lastly, tertiary level EFL students favor the inclusion of L1 due to feeling comfortable, at ease, and less stressed (Debreli & Oyman, 2016). Besides, tertiary level teachers also regard L1 as a facilitating function as they think it can be used for lower-level students for various purposes including teaching grammar, explaining differences between L1 and L2, or solving disciplinary problems (İnal & Turhanlı, 2019).

Consequently, L1 in Turkish context continues to be a persistent issue for various reasons. Therefore, within this study locating itself in an ESP context, whereby use of L1 is clearly under researched, use of L1 was restricted to the teaching of grammar to deal with unresponsive learners. Hence, if and how it remedied their unresponsiveness and benefits, as reported by the learners, are examined.

Research context and the problem

The ESP course, as the context for the study, runs in the Banking and Finance Department of Applied Sciences School of a State University founded in 1982 in northwest Turkey. It is extensive, assessed, and compulsory, and targets the delayed needs (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) of the learners (*N*=40) taking the course in their senior year. As there were no programmatic documents regarding the course, *its goals and outcomes, content, methodology, teaching resources and materials, and testing and evaluation issues*, I, as the teacher, adopted an integrated-skills approach, including the four primary *reading, listening, writing, speaking*, and related skills *vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, grammar, and meaning*. To ease their optimal integration (Oxford, 2001), I selected a coursebook (see Hobbs & Starr Keddle, 2007) to guide the likely content. To this end, each class included *start ups* to warm the learners up and introduce them with key vocabulary and concepts. They were followed by *reading and listening* (depending on the flow of the content) and teaching of *grammar* generated by the topic. Besides, the classes included functional language i.e. *giving opinions, agreeing or disagreeing* etc., and listening tasks asking students to analyze the interaction, and then practicing the language function in meaningful contexts through speaking tasks. Writing tasks, i.e. *writing personal profile, or an application letter* etc., either in-class, self-study, or homework, were also included.

Despite seeming in harmony, in practice it wasn't as the learners were hard to involve although I adjusted my speech through slow talk, simple wording, and repetitions (Gass & Selinker, 2008) and tried to simplify the discussions and used rephrases to encourage them to respond. For instance, in a unit dealing with "Changing World", as a warm up, I simply asked the question, "What is changing?" Although they were supposed to have a lot to say, such as cars, schools, education, technology, communication, media, etc., this was not what happened. I had to prompt them with some more questions like "Is shopping changing? Are you still store shopping or shopping online?, Is travelling changing? Is it becoming faster and more comfortable? etc." However, those responded were very few; only the ones relatively more competent in English. It was the moment that I thought there was a problem, *unresponsiveness*, and I needed to do something. When I made that decision, it had almost been two months since the term started, whereby I experienced many other similar moments. As it was a year-long course, I knew it could not continue this way since it would make no benefit to the learners. Therefore, I knew action research (AR) methodology would suit best for finding a solution to the problem and improving the situation.

Therefore, the following questions were addressed;

1. What do the ESP learners think about the reasons of their unresponsiveness, and what do they suggest solving it?
2. What are the benefits of integrating L1 into grammar teaching, *as reported by the ESP learners*?

Method

Methodology, intervention, and data collection

In AR methodology, there is a cycle working with the combination of some steps, i.e. detecting the problem, developing an action plan to address it, putting the plan into action, collecting data and reflecting to see if and how the action works, and if needed, another round of reflecting and action to improve the plan (Burns, 2009; Kayaoğlu, 2015; Lebak & Tinsley, 2010; Rainey, 2000). Figure below shows the AR cycle (Figure 1).
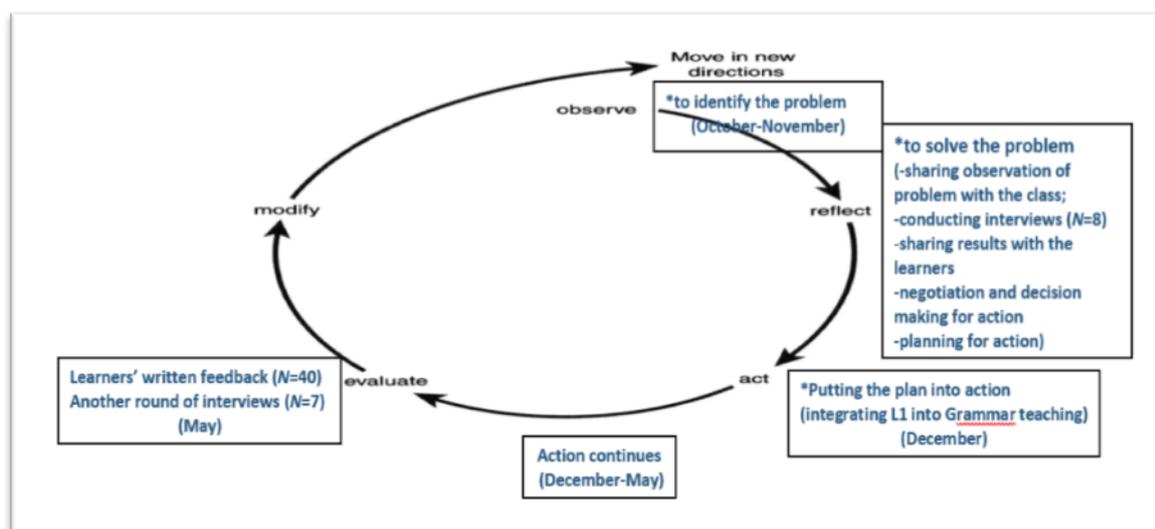
Figure 1. AR cycle in research design and data collection.

The *observation* occurred throughout October-November via deliberate attention to understand what was going on in the class as the learners were hard to involve. Following the detection of the problem, *unresponsiveness,* I did whatever I could, to activate them and become responsive. Seeing that my efforts made no big difference, I kept thinking, *reflection*, as I became sure that I needed to do something. Taking a further step, I shared my observation of the problem with the class and asked them if they wanted to help me find a solution regarding what they needed and wanted. Hence, we planned for interviews, *as preliminary needs analysis*, which were conducted with those (*N*=8) volunteered. For the interviews, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used. Keeping reflecting on what the learners meant as the interviews continued (end of November), I performed the data analysis. Despite some other issues (which are dealt with in detail in findings) mentioned equally, the learners majorly complained about *use of English as medium of instruction* and suggested that they needed L1 (Turkish).

Having achieved such a finding, I was challenged as I always thought English should be taught in English since being exposed to the language in class, particularly in English as foreign language (EFL) settings and having the opportunities for using the language are key for learners to learn, practice, familiarize themselves with the language, and ultimately become competent in it (Ellis, 1994). However, I also knew that in any context of teaching, learners' needs and wants come first. Thus, I started reviewing if and to what extent L1 should be integrated into teaching, although I knew, it should be to some extent since leaving learners' L1 backgrounds aside was not fair either. Following this inner and mental critic, synthesized with the readings, I shared the findings (Table 2) with the learners and asked them to negotiate. Through the negotiations right at that time, without any interference of me, the learners decided that they needed *L1* particularly *for the teaching of grammar* as they thought that a great extent of their unresponsiveness resulted from their grammatical incompetence which challenged them in comprehending the input and accordingly responding to it. This made sense as not being able to respond indicated lack of communicative competence which includes the "knowledge of rules of phonology, lexis, syntax, and semantics" (Canale & Swain, 1980 as cited in Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010, p.294). The connection between them further refers to grammatical knowledge including grammatical forms plus grammatical and pragmatic meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 1991, 1997 as cited in Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

Following this decision making, I took some more time to review the coursebook (see Hobbs & Starr Keddle, 2007) to see how many grammatical points there were ahead to cover, where I would need to switch to Turkish, and how I would do it, either implicitly or explicitly. Thus, the following action plan was formed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Action plan

	WHAT?			HOW?
Actions	*Grammar point;*	*Schema building;*	*Grammar teaching followed;*	*Explicit grammar teaching was followed by;*
A1	Will, be going to, will have to, will be able to	Talking about future predictions	Reading "Future predictions"	"getting the learners to complete a set of given opinions with the grammar points, then to discuss their answers in pairs"
A2	Must, can't, may, might, could	Talking about changing countries and working abroad	Reading "Job adventures"	"getting the learners to match some captions with the rules, and to speculate about given problems"
A3	The Passive	Talking about ethical consuming	Reading "Fairtrade"	"getting the learners to find examples from the reading text".
A4	Conditionals	Talking about diversity at workplace	Reading "Discrimination at work"	"getting the learners to find examples of conditionals in the reading text and to complete the given sentences with the correct form of conditionals"
A5	Past Perfect	Talking about brands and values	Reading "Nike"	"getting the learners to find examples from the reading text and to write explanations for given situations"
A6	Must have/can't have/might-could have +past participle	Talking about workplace, office, and office space	Reading "News from the workplace"	"getting the learners to match the given captions with the given pictures and to complete the given sentences with the grammar point"
A7	Third conditional	Talking about personal qualities, workplace skills	Listening "TEAM building games and activities"	"getting the learners to listen to some situations and imagine the results and to complete the given sentences with the grammar point"
A8	Reported speech: said, told, and questions	Talking about giving presentations	Listening "A presentation delivered to Internet access company"	"getting the learners to listen to more extracts from the programme and correct the errors in given notes; and getting them to report some more extracts from the listening."

As shown, there were eight grammar points. The teaching of each began with schema building through brainstorming. Depending on the presentation of the content, reading or listening was carried out as a means of presenting the learners with the contexts to infer the structure. This implicit activation, which was in English, was followed by explicit teaching of grammar. At that point, I switched to Turkish to present both form and function as the learners needed not only to gain knowledge and skills of the structure but also in which context to use it. The use of Turkish was not simply and only to give a brief explanation of the grammar point, to provide the learners with a deductive rule in other words, rather it was to help them comprehend what the form is, what it does, in which contexts, for which purposes it is used, and to what extent it resembles or differs from the Turkish equivalent. The teaching of each grammar point within each unit took almost an hour which made one-fourth of the weekly hour. The teaching of grammar was then followed by practicing through various tasks (the last column in the table). As there were multiple actions, each also helped me improve those coming next. This *intervention* step, *integration of L1 into grammar teaching*, continued till the end of academic year (May 15th) which made almost 20 weeks.

As the steps in AR are more than teaching, they also included data collection and its analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of the solution (Ellis, 2012). Therefore, evaluation was maintained through the learners' end-of-course written reflections (*N*=40) and another round of interviews (*N*=7) to further open their reflections and encourage them to elaborate on the benefits of the intervention, if there was any. For this second round of interviews, another semi-structured interview form was developed and used. At this point, I need to mention that assessment practices including two mid-term and two end-of-term exams included grammar tasks to see if and

how the use of L1 improved the learners' knowledge and performance. However, they are not included in this paper due to the difficulty of presenting and discussing all findings within the confines of them.

Therefore, qualitative data was appropriate as it would help develop deeper understanding and "capture a sufficient level of detail about the natural context" and "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.38).
Participants

The participants, who were 22 on average, had diverse language learning background and competencies although they were supposed to be true pre-intermediates as they were taking the course. Those interviewed for the preliminary interviews included 5 females and 3 males, and others in the second round of interviews at the end of the term included 4 females and 3 males. Those provided end-of-course written reflections included 14 females and 12 males. All started taking English beginning from the secondary school. As they had been through different high schools, including multi-program and the vocational ones, they had different experiences like an interested and competent teacher in one hand, or a disinterested teacher only using Turkish in the other. They regarded this as a major reason for their lack of language competency. There were also some others who told that another teacher, a physical education for instance, taught since there was no English teacher in their school. Hence, they did not even have the chance to adequately learn English. Some even took the responsibility of their inadequate background of English due to not having self-study skills. Lastly, they were seen to have different motivation and interest in learning which made some of them interested, active, and responsive and many others unresponsive and hard to involve.

Data analysis

The data collected from the interviews and written reflections were qualitatively analyzed and then quantified. The interview data were firstly transformed into texts through transcriptions (Dörnyei, 2007) which were then read several times until familiarization was assured (Creswell, 2009) particularly to "start teasing out the hidden meaning from it" (Dörnyei, 2007, p.242). Analysis of the transcriptions was made through qualitative content analysis including quantification of certain words, phrases, or issues falling into a specific category emerging out of the data (Dörnyei, 2007). For the analysis of the written reflections which were large in sample (*N*=40), and were comprised of almost a page feedback, in some instances more, data saturation was kept in mind as it would become repetitive (Mason, 2010) which means that there is no more new information, thus no need for further analysis and coding as iterative process of looking back and forth in the data produces no more ideas and categories (Dörnyei, 2007). Therefore, a sample of 26 was achieved through reduction. At this point, I need to clarify that the reduction was not random. All the reflections were read thoroughly a couple of times and coded. However, the coding did not end in the first cycle. I kept coding and recoding (see Saldana, 2009). Through these cycles of coding, I had the chance to see the extent of depth in the reflection. Thus, those which were superficial and only recurrent in that idea (code) without a strong evidence were excluded from the final analysis. For this reason, depth and richness of the reflections, despite indication of the same code, determined the level of saturation as there was no more detailed data (Fush & Ness, 2015). To assure the validation and confidentiality of the findings, another language teacher, who was internal to the research context, but outsider to the study, crosschecked the categories, themes, and verbatim data, and provided confirmation and suggestions as well for the improvisation of the categorizations. As for privacy of the participants and their responses, numbers were given both for the interviews and their written reflections as the findings were reported.

Findings

Learners' reasons regarding their unresponsiveness: findings from preliminary interviews

The first round of interviews elicited the learners' reasons regarding their *unresponsiveness* and negotiation of what they wanted and needed to solve it. Table below presents the findings.

Table 2. Learners' reasons regarding their unresponsiveness

Categories	Themes	f
Teaching methodology	*use of English as medium of instruction	7
Grammatical incompetence	*inadequate syntactic knowledge	7
Listening comprehension incompetence	*inadequate knowledge of sound discrimination/word recognition	7
Previous learning habits	*previous teachers' teaching style & methods	3
	*education system (pass or failure mechanism)	1
	*lack of interest in language learning in early years of it	1
Vocabulary incompetence	*inadequate repository of vocabulary knowledge	5
Lack of motivation in language learning	*coming to the classes unprepared	4
	*external motivation	1
Pronunciation incompetence	*lack of phonology knowledge	3
	*lack of confidence	1
Speaking incompetence	*inability to make full sentences	1
	*inadequate knowledge of mechanics of language (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar)	2
Speaking anxiety	*exam-oriented system	2
	*inadequate command of English	1
Lack of speaking practice	*limited out-of-class engagement with language	3
Peer/teacher pressure	*fear of being laughed at	2
	*class size	1
Fear of failure	*learned helplessness (due to lack of background knowledge of language)	3
Total		55

As seen, there are various reasons, but some dominate. Firstly, majority of them attached their unresponsiveness to *the teachers' teaching methodology* (*n*=7) relying on use of English as medium of instruction. For instance, Learner1 stated *"Your use of English from the very beginning... We know some of the words, can understand some of them, or go and search for some others. But as the friends told, then the complaints emerged..., 'the teacher always speaks English', at least spread some Turkish around."* This majorly indicates comprehension problem which also suggests inadequacies in their receptive skills. Besides, *grammatical incompetence* (*n*=7) was another reason confirming the solution, *use of L1 in teaching grammar*, they offered. *"We don't know, understand, don't know what to use when to use ... we lack grammar knowledge. ... Some of us speak, but they lack grammar ..., even when you teach grammar in English, I have problems. At least for me, it would be better if it was through Turkish" (Learner2).* As a very basic skill in classroom interaction, *listening comprehension competence which they found themselves incompetent* (*n*=7) was also suggested as a reason since they justified having inadequate knowledge of sound discrimination and word recognition which are key to comprehend the input and respond to it appropriately. Although the learners equally mentioned the three reasons, their primary focus was on the use of English as medium of instruction which they thought to trigger their incomprehension of the input and inability to respond. The presence of grammar and listening incompetence in the background also exacerbated the situation.

Besides, *previous learning habits* (*n*=5), previous teachers' teaching styles and methodologies majorly relying on Grammar Translation Method and adopting Turkish as medium of instruction, were other reasons. Those who did so also thought that lack of interest in their early years of language learning and the education system which they thought to rely on pass or fail mechanism caused them to become unresponsive. *"It is too late to not to understand [to be unresponsive]. It is due to the quality of education in schools, particularly inadequate education in high schools. .... It takes 12 years till the university, but they cannot give directions to a tourist, such a bitter truth. ... The education system in schools relies on memorization, there is no place for practice. There is nothing making you speak English. One just memorizes and passes the exams, and they don't try to learn, but just to pass the course" (Learner4).* Other reasons included; *vocabulary incompetence* (*n*=5), as a natural extension of inadequate vocabulary repository; *lack of motivation* (*n*=5) resulting in coming classes unprepared, just to pass them as an indicator of their external motivation; and *pronunciation incompetence* (*n*=4) as a reflection of inadequate phonology knowledge, production of sounds, sound patterns, and words in speech. Therefore, due to weak knowledge of grammatical forms of language, they regarded *speaking incompetence* (*n*=3) as another reason. Learner7 expressed this nicely; *"Due to inadequacy of both vocabulary and*

pronunciation, it is impossible to move on to speaking. ... Although I love learning new words, due to my language background which I do not see strong, speaking is a problem for me, ... grammar is also a great deficiency..." Similarly, *speaking anxiety* (*n*=3) and *lack of speaking practice* (*n*=3), due to limited out of classroom engagement with language and inadequate command of English, are linked to speaking incompetence too. Lastly, they mentioned *peer/teacher pressure* (*n*=3) resulting from fear of being laughed at when making mistakes, and *fear of failure* (*n*=3) due to weak background knowledge of language.

Benefits of L1 in grammar teaching: findings from end-of-course written reflections and another round of interviews

First and foremost, their written reflections showed that they were good and critical observers of what was being done over the process, as they knew it was a response to their needs. *"What I've liked most about this course is your effort to consider how we can understand better and design accordingly. While I have not understood it at all, I have now become to do so" (written reflection18).* Another said, *"it was extraordinary" (written reflection25).*

Table 3. Benefits of L1 in teaching grammar

Benefits	*f*
More and better input comprehension	15
Vocabulary skills development	12
Improved grammar knowledge	9
Writing skills development	6
Speaking skills development	2
Awareness regarding language learning	2
Breaking down prejudice towards English	1
Awareness regarding lacks	1
Total	*48*

When it comes to the benefits (Table 3), development of *input comprehension* (*n*=15) comes first. *"... Yes, I was challenged to understand, but I have now become to watch most of TV series without subtitles ..." (written reflection4). Vocabulary skills development* (*n*=12) was another benefit as they linked it to the input they received and word building practices regularly dealt with in each topic. Some stated that emphasis put on grammar teaching facilitated their familiarization with new words which is a contribution of learners' L1 and teacher talk to incidental vocabulary learning even when input includes unfamiliar words. For instance, *"Besides use of Turkish in grammar teaching, the reading texts and tasks related to them were very contributory. As we worked on the reading texts, my vocabulary knowledge and awareness regarding grammatical forms developed" (written reflection20).* Another major benefit is *writing skills development* (*n*=6) as they were regularly involved in writing tasks. In her reflection, one (*written reflection22*) said, *"I already had some grammar knowledge. But, with the contribution of the course, it has become better. This is also due to the teaching of grammar through L1. I've begun writing something in writing sections."* Despite less frequent, few (*n*=2) thought their *speaking skills* developed. Some others emphasized that they started gaining awareness regarding language learning (*n*=2), due to involvement in classroom tasks. Similarly, one (*written reflection16*) told, s*he began breaking down her prejudices towards English thanks to the teacher's teaching methodology*, and her comment shows the need for teaching which is responsive to the contextual factors, realities of the classroom, and its learners' needs and expectations. Lastly, one (*written reflection4*) said special attention paid to the teaching of grammar and use of L1 enabled her to become aware of what grammar forms she lacked and needed to develop.

Another round of interviews was conducted to elicit the learners' further reflections regarding the benefits of teaching grammar through L1. First and foremost, except one, all (*n*=6) thought it worked well. To justify what he thought, Learner3, who was one of those responsive ones, stated *"It was nice. If it had been through English, they [those unresponsive] would have made more mistakes in the exams. It was more comprehensible. Additionally, as the topics went complex, we would have had more difficulty in understanding".* Similarly, Learner5 thought *"It worked quite a lot. When it was through English, it was hard to comprehend. We got it [what and how to use] better. If it had been through English, it would have made no benefit. Seeing that I got it, I felt motivated".* Another, who was a retake, also shared similar thoughts as she thought use of L1 made it easier to recall, as she had difficulty in doing so (Learner4). However, Learner6 who was one of those responsive learners thought *"It should be (also have been) through English. Those who are unable to*

understand should have been eliminated somehow in previous years. Not being able to comprehend at this level is not normal. Your use of English as medium of instruction is very nice as it helps us see good use of language, get familiar with new words, their pronunciation, and better listening comprehension." Moreover, they thought their language learning was positively affected as they became to comprehend more and better through "comparing with Turkish (Learner5)", "getting meaning through sentence structure (Learner3)", or "performing better in listening tasks (Learner2)". They also developed awareness regarding how different aspects of language work (metalinguistic awareness) as they "started realizing sentence structure better as it is different from Turkish (Learner3)". They also started making sense of meaning better as they "gained more awareness regarding morphology (Learner1, Learner3)", and "syntax (Learner5)". Besides, they developed self-confidence regarding language comprehension as they "felt better in finding the Turkish equivalent of language forms (Learner4)", particularly in "writing and speaking (Learner1, Learner6)", and "word formation (Learner5)". As seen, they attained self-confidence in various aspects. Similarly, they started feeling less stressed and anxious which previously resulted from incomprehension (Learner1, Learner4). Lastly, to some extent, some stated relating English to Turkish which could show transfer effect of L1, as generally acknowledged. However, for Learner1 it was possible for some Tenses [simple present, present continuous, simple past], but was hard as they continued [she means those that do not coincide e.g. present perfect tense which is hard to comprehend for Turkish learners]. For another, it was hard to do so particularly for if clause Type 2 as he was challenged to comprehend unreal present in Turkish (Learner6). Hence, if the forms in two languages match, learners take the advantage of it, and if vice versa, they are challenged as relating new structures to their already established schemas might be difficult.

Discussion

Despite lack of research on learners' (second, foreign, or ESP) unresponsiveness in language classes, studies investigated the issue from similar perspectives such as silence, reluctance, and speaking anxiety (Cepon, 2016; Iglesias, 2016; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Savaşçı, 2014; Subaşı, 2010; Tatar, 2005). Similar results such as not being able find correct word(s), not being able to pronounce correctly, lack of speaking practice, lack of communicative competence, lack of grammar knowledge, weak language background, fear of making mistakes, and negative evaluation of peers and teachers are reported among the major causes of it (Cepon, 2016; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Takkaç Tulgar, 2018; Xie, 2017). Those who are competent are also reported to be unresponsive (Şubası, 2010) which could have a link to low self-confidence (see Akkakoson, 2016; Bailey, 1983, as cited in Ellis, 1994; Savaşçı, 2014; Riasati, 2018) making learners avoid responding. In her study on Turkish international graduate students' silence, Tatar (2005) reveals similar issues i.e. insufficient language skills due to non-nativeness, peers particularly those native and competent dominating the discussions and causing intimidation on those who are relatively less competent, some degree of anxiety due to fear of making mistakes thus losing face and prestigious, and unpreparedness and low self-confidence. Besides, fear of failure and fear of being laughed at impede student success in the classroom (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014). Hence, it is obvious that responding is a combination of cognitive, intellectual, and affective states.

When it comes to the benefits of the action to solve out unresponsiveness, the learners in this study were positive regarding use of L1 and appreciated it since the classroom atmosphere and their needs were considered. For instance, being able to comprehend the input more and better is an important finding as listening comprehension incompetence was one of the basic reasons for their unresponsiveness (see Table 2). As listening does not simply mean the act of hearing, not being able to comprehend what they listened to indicates their weakness to detect the phonemes, morphemes, grammatical form, intended and implied meaning (see Larsen-Freeman, 1991, 1997 as cited in Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Therefore, it seems that the process made a difference on the development of their grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation knowledge as key issues in language learning for being able to interact and respond since without comprehension of any of these, which does not guarantee but is a prerequisite, learning is almost impossible to occur (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Krashen, 2004). Studies similarly using the L1 (Spanish) selectively also show that L1 functions as an effective tool for cross-linguistic analysis to enable learners to understand and acquire vocabulary in English as they analyze and compare words with their equivalents in L1 (see Cuartas Alvarez, 2014). Besides, the learners' vocabulary development might be linked to the role of L1 in relating new knowledge to the existing one by making semantic and syntactic connections (Yürekli Kaynardağ, 2016) which Butzkamm (2003) regards as "building cross-linguistic networks" (p.35). This could suggest transfer effect (Du, 2016; Madrinan, 2014; Mede et al., 2014) influencing how meaning and content are conveyed through deliberate attention to language forms (Nation, 2003). Moreover, as the rest of the course, the teaching and practice of other skills, were still through English, the input that the learners received through listening tasks, the teacher and peer talks, and practices following grammar teaching could have facilitated vocabulary learning and the ability to comprehend. Despite

considering use of English as medium of instruction as a problem in the beginning, the learners started finding it as a facilitator as the time passed. Therefore, despite the challenges resulting from their language background, motivational, and affective states, this finding could show the difference that persistent use of English, exposure to it, and teacher's talk as a model in language classrooms (Lew, 2015) made since "it serves as the significant, and sometimes only, source of authentic, scaffolded input" (Moeller & Roberts, 2013, p.22).

Writing skills development as another major benefit because of regular involvement in writing tasks supports the contribution of grammar teaching through L1 as it awakens universal grammar (see Butzkamm, 2003), thus results in better performance and active involvement (Lameta-Tufuga, 1994, cited in Nation, 2003; Usadiati, 2009). This could also show that as the learners comprehended the related grammar structure, they became to use it to express their ideas in written language which could have made them perceive that their writing skills developed. Because, it is definite that learners get stuck if they are not able to find the right structure or vocabulary to express their thoughts both written and spoken. Therefore, comprehension of grammatical structures in English and matching them to their equivalents in L1 could improve learners' expressions in written language. Besides, the development of *speaking skill*s could result from the teacher's and peers' talk in the class which provided the learners with the chance of being exposed to the language and practice it, though not directly targeted. Thus, the maximization of classroom input seemed to affect the learners' L2 development (Turnbull, 2001). *Gaining awareness regarding language learning and grammatical knowledge they lack*ed and *breaking down their prejudices towards English* for some learners show that use of L1 in grammar teaching could have activated their awareness regarding if and how both language forms match (Butzkamm, 2003; Sinclair, 1986) as learners could use their L1 as a reference point to make cross-comparison of grammar structures in both languages and to make sense of the input they receive in English (also see Cuartas Alvarez, 2014). Hence, this shows the need for responsive teaching which considers the contextual factors, realities of the classroom and its learners' needs and expectations and which could affect later success of learning (Auerbach, 1993).

When all benefits are critically examined, the process is seen to be effective. This could have a link to L1's potential to lower such affective barriers as speaking anxiety, low motivation, fear of failure, or peer/teacher pressure which the learners included among the reasons of their unresponsiveness. Hence, no matter how learners are challenged as they are exposed to English in class, continuous involvement in it is seen to make a difference, thus as research suggests (Butzkamm, 2003; Cheng, 2015), role of L1 cannot be disregarded to ease the tension in language classroom. Besides, considering that L1 was only integrated to teaching grammar, the benefits emerged out of their reflections could highlight the role of effective use of both L1 and English (Lida, 2014) as learners are known to use their L1 as a cognitive tool (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Moreover, integrating L1 into teaching grammar could have also facilitated the learners' awareness regarding sub-components, i.e. phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics which the grammatical knowledge and competence includes (Canale & Swain, 1980 as cited in Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010) as the cross-comparison of L1 and English was provided. Lastly, all stated that they became more willing to participate and communicate (also see Uztosun et al., 2014). In this sense, the shift from unresponsiveness to the perception of willingness to participate and communicate could have resulted from developing confidence in their abilities to use English in the class (also see Cuartas Alvarez, 2014). Therefore, in such cases where learners' voices are considered, their motivation and self-esteem are boosted (see Uztosun et al., 2014, 2018).

Therefore, as many others suggest (Awan & Sipra, 2015; Berning, 2016; Çelik, 2008; Nation, 2003) L1 should be used if needed, but over reliance should definitely be avoided as learners may not benefit particularly in EFL contexts where teachers are the only linguistic model and source of input (Turnbull, 2001). However, in cases, like the current, where learners are less proficient and lack adequate knowledge of language, resistance and unresponsiveness might emerge. Therefore, L1 is seen to scaffold cognitive workload and ease comprehension (Bruen & Kelly, 2014).

Consequently, unresponsiveness can be solved through creation of appropriate learning environments and improvement of teaching methods (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Zhouyuan, 2016). Therefore, there needs to be means, teaching methodologies, specific techniques, and classroom research (see Uztosun et al., 2014, 2018) to meet learners' needs to encourage them to become active and responsive.

Conclusion and implications

Firstly, as a response to the learners' unresponsiveness in an ESP context, this study reports the results revealed through the action, *integration of L1 into teaching grammar,* taken with reference to their needs and wants. In particular, the reasons of their unresponsiveness and the benefits of the action were sought.

The study shows that learners' unresponsiveness in language classroom is a combination of cognitive, intellectual, and affective issues (Tatar, 2005). The reason that the learners majorly focused on was the teaching methodology, which adopted English as medium of instruction, but was disliked due to comprehension problems resulting from weaknesses in their language background, thus triggering unresponsiveness. This suggests some certain level of grammar, vocabulary, and phonology knowledge (Gass & Selinker, 2008) is influential on being responsive, but development of which do not emerge overnight. Moreover, motivational concerns together with the social context of the classroom, i.e. peer and teacher pressure, are included among the reasons. Hence, we need competent and interested teachers transforming their classrooms into effective learning environments and giving learners the chances to acquire and develop their language skills as well as their confidence and motivation to become active and responsive. In this case, the role played by responsive teaching is undeniable since acknowledging classroom realities and assessing and addressing learners' needs and wants make a difference. In this regard, action research can be effective to meet learners' needs and empower both learners and teachers (see Ali, 2020).

The results also show that learners' behaviors change when measures are taken. Within this study, the learners held positive perceptions regarding integration of L1 into teaching grammar as it was seen to facilitate language skills development and various aspects of language learning i.e., metalinguistic awareness, input comprehension, and also self-confidence and lower stress and anxiety which were seen to facilitate their willingness to participate and communicate (also see Uztosun et al., 2014). However, it needs to be remembered that L1 had a controlled use as it was only used for teaching grammar. Therefore, use of English as medium of instruction was still seen to contribute as the learners reported development in various aspects of language i.e. input comprehension, awareness regarding their lacks, etc. Therefore, no matter how learners resist as they experience difficulties in comprehension, persistent use of English is seen to change the stance they take towards it. Hence, language teachers should have the awareness and skills to balance L1 and English as leaving L1 aside, only for the sake of English, would have the risk to make no difference as incomprehension would further block learning. Thus, facilitative role of L1 shows that it should and needs to be in language classrooms (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Bruen & Kelly, 2014; Butzkamm, 2003; Jan et al., 2014) despite the challenges that over reliance on it bring.

Besides the benefits that the learners made, I, as the researcher, should also reflect on my experience as it was a breakthrough to change my mindset. I was challenged in the beginning if I really needed to adopt L1 in teaching. However, what I had found through the learners' reflections showed me that it really worked as it resulted in various benefits. I also observed some learners who were almost completely silent then became responsive. They openly acknowledged the difference, i.e. becoming to comprehend and feeling motivated to join all the classes, that the action made. Hence, in my further teaching practices, I now have a concrete evidence of if and how much L1 works. Therefore, as the existing research suggest, AR has a critical value on teacher learning (Johnson, 2009; Kayaoğlu, 2015).

Lastly, despite all the contributions achieved through the adoption of AR methodology, the study is not free from limitations as it reports the case of a single class, thus findings need to be validated by further research. First and foremost, the data relies on the learners' self-reports and perceptions which might require observation data to validate their perceptions. Besides, due to lack of tests measuring their grammar knowledge before the study, there is no data in hand. Therefore, further studies in similar contexts could begin with a pre-test and re-apply it at the end to see if teaching grammar through L1 makes a difference on grammar knowledge.

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