# Introduction

Over the past century, the question over the effectiveness of L1 use in target language learning has been raised by many researchers (Butzkamm, 2003; Gabrielatos, 2001; Tetiurka, 2016). Some scholars have argued that the prohibition of L1 increases the amount of input in target language learning classroom (Mahmoudi & Yazdiamirkhiz, 2011; Nazary, 2008). The main idea of maximizing the amount of target language input relates to monolingual approach (Macaro, 2001), which emphasizes that teachers used only the target language input and avoided use of learners’ L1 (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages 2010; Macdonald 1993).

The controversy about the use of L1 originated in monolingual approach (Lasagabaster, 2013), which puts emphasis on comprehensible input (Krashen & Terell, 1992), negotiation of meaning (Long & Doughty, 2011), and a quantity of target language input (Mitchell, 2011). In line with monolingual approach, absolutism presumes that ‘with absolute confidence but no substantial evidence’ that monolingual approach ‘is the one true path to success, and that learners will prefer it to bilingual approaches’ (Cook, 2010). According to Cook (2001), L2 learners should acquire a target language in a monolingual environment, which shares common characteristics when it is compared with the procedure of a baby learning a mother tongue. Furthermore, it has been suggested that L2 learners can construct their own L2 learning system spontaneously, which can be entirely separated from their built-in L1 system, which is defined as ‘coordinate bilingualism’ (Weinreich, 1968).

Nonetheless, much literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about monolingual approach, revealing that it may not always be applicable in case of target language learning (Lee & Macaro, 2013; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008; Tian & Macaro, 2012). Also, questions have been raised about ‘coordinate bilingualism’ (Dussias & Sagarra, 2007; Van Hell & Dijkstra, 2002) that both L1 and L2 language systems, in fact, are inextricably linked with each other rather than being isolated from each other.

The use of learners’ L1 has continuously existed in EFL classrooms, demonstrating that there is an explicit discrepancy between ELT literature and teachers’ practical L1 practices on the spot (Hall & Cook, 2013). Recently researchers have explored the attitude of L1 use of EFL elementary English teachers, showing that they felt guilty about the use of L1 since the national curriculum of foreign language education strongly banned using L1 (Timor, 2012). In addition to that, the majority of teachers teaching English avoided using L1 on purpose since they figured that it goes against the recent pedagogy of teaching English (Miri, Alibakhshi & Mostafaei-Alaei, 2016). Also, they maintained that if they consistently keep these two languages separate in classrooms, it is highly probable that learners are to develop two individual competencies for L1 and English (Miri, Alibakhshi & Mostafaei-Alaei, 2016). This has led to an emerging discussion in the field in which numerous studies found that L1 and L2 are interdependent and the two are able to interact with each other (Dussias & Sagarra, 2007; Swain, Kirkpatrick & Cummins, 2011, Van Hell & Dijkstra, 2002) rather than being stored in separate boxes (Swain, Kirkpatrick & Cummins, 2011).

In light of recent events, the Teaching English in English policy has emerged as a powerful platform in Korea (Choi, 2014) and a number of policies have been introduced to foster learners’ productive competence and one of the policies referred to as Teaching English in English sets English as a medium of instruction, enforcing teachers to use English more than 80% out of their entire instruction during a class (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2006). The policy where English is considered as a medium of instruction is not only applied in Asian countries, but also applied in Europe in which its official language is not spoken globally and it has been extensively adopted in many educational settings as a measure for learners to be ready for the era of globalization (Byun et al. 2010). Contrary to the educational purpose of English to be set as a medium of instruction, it has been turned out that there is not enough interaction in classrooms with no feedback of wrong target language usage (Kang et al. 2007, Kang & Park, 2004). In a similar vein, the debate about L1 use has gained fresh prominence with many arguing that it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the reconceptualization of the use of L1 (Lee & Macaro, 2013; Tian & Macaro, 2012). That is to say, although English-only policies in EFL contexts are prevalent, several researchers have concluded that judicious or principled use of L1 could be helpful for learners (Hawks, 2001; Meyer, 2008; Norman, 2008).

It is now well established that Teaching English in English policy could impair both the process of learning and teaching, resulting in the failure of implementing communicative language learning (Chung & Choi, 2016) and its entire application could be seriously affected by an EFL teacher’s proficiency level or variations of learner’s L2 abilities or various perspectives of learners towards Teaching English in English policy and thereby a complete exclusion of learner’s L1 in target language learning classroom is often criticized (Kang, 2008). At present, most of the existing literature on the use of L1 has been concerned with reinforcing comprehension, decreasing learner’s fear of using a target language, providing opportunities for learners to participate in classrooms regardless of their proficiency level of a target language, and building rapport between learners and teachers (Butzkamm, 2003; Cook, 2001; Forman, 2010; Macaro, 2001; Mahboob, 2011). As noted by Auerbach (1993), teaching with learner’s L1 is far more effective in facilitating learner’s classroom participation as it serves to lower learner’s affective filter and it guides them to be more adventurous than ever before. Likewise, previous research has also established that the exclusive use of L2 from a teacher does not always guarantee an increase in the amount of L2 use from students and when a teacher’s code-switching was conducted below 10% of an entire classroom interaction it does not stimulate learners to use excessive L1 (Macaro, 2001; Macaro & Mutton, 2002).

However, as MacDonald outlined (1993), questions have been raised about the teacher’s overuse of learner’s L1, which would discourage learners from learning a target language and there is a strong possibility of a whole target language learning classroom being turned into a total waste of time as an irresponsible teacher sticks to the use of L1 in a classroom all the time, severely decreasing target language inputs needed for learners. Nevertheless, as Cameron (2001) put it, she argued that redefinition of the use of L1 does not always equate to the overuse of L1, rather it does imply the meaning of maximizing meaningful learning opportunities for learners to be able to participate in target language learning. Therefore, the issue of balancing between a L1 and a target language in foreign language contexts has received considerable attention (Littlewood & Yu, 2011).

Researchers have long debated the usefulness of L1 in target language learning, however, there has been little discussion about in what ways is Korean elementary English teachers’ use of L1 may support their teaching and their learners learning of English. In contrast to the scarcity of research being implemented in Korean elementary school contexts, there is some information about the consideration of the use of L1 in Korean high school contexts, summarizing its use primarily for instructing intricate grammar concepts or supporting learners when they have difficulty of expressing their own ideas in target language (Liu et al. 2004). Again, what is not yet clear is how a teacher’s use of L1 can support the teaching and learning process in Korean elementary school context. This indicates a need for deeper inquiry into the use of L1 by Korean elementary English teachers and its effects on elementary school students.

## **Purpose of the study**

This study investigates ways in which Korean elementary English teachers’ use of L1 in the L2 classroom facilitates and supports the teaching and learning of English. It has been noted that using English entirely during English class does not always help learners comprehend what they learn and may even decrease the amount of student participation in class.

The use of L1 has been avoided in language teaching classrooms in South Korea since teachers, parents of students and even students themselves have considered teaching and learning English in English is the most idealistic way to provide or get plentiful input that has to be followed rather than depending on some use of L1. However, L1 itself can be effective and supportive in that it works as a catalyst rather than a hinderance in target language learning.

Through this study, I would like to explore how using L1 in Korean elementary English classroom may facilitate English teaching and what positive effects it might have on the teaching and learning process of target language.

Consequently, the present study explores to find answers to the following research questions: 1) In what ways is L1 used by Korean Elementary English teachers to support their teaching and their learners’ learning of English? 2) How do teachers feel their L1 use supports their entire teaching process? 3. How do learners feel towards their teacher’s use of L1 in their L2 learning process?

The purpose of this investigation is to explore the relationship between a teacher’s L1 use and its effects on L2 learners. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of a teachers’ L1 use in a target language classroom, helping Korean elementary English teachers advance the understanding of the role of L1 in English classrooms by exploring in what ways they make use of L1 and how they feel about it in their teaching contexts. The findings should make an important contribution to the field of target language acquisition and the work presented here provides one of the first insights into how teachers’ L1 use supports their teaching and their learners’ learning of English in Korean elementary English classrooms. Therefore, the issue of an elementary English teacher’s use of L1 in a target language learning classroom would definitely resurface through the research.