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**Use of Arabic in the EFL classroom: Attitudes
and practices of university instructors**

إعداد

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Abstract :

This study aims to find out the attitudes of university instructors towards the use of Arabic in teaching EFL. It also aims to explore how often and for what purposes they use it in their classes. Thirty-two instructors from three universities participated in the study. All of them were native speakers of Arabic, and they came from five Arab countries. The data were collected through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire that inquired into university instructors' attitudes towards the use of Arabic in the EFL classroom as well as the purposes for which they use it. The findings revealed that all instructors were of the opinion that English should be the main language used in the classroom. They also showed that the majority of them believed that Arabic should be used only at certain points of a lesson. It was also found that the majority of instructors share more negative than positive attitudes towards the use of Arabic in EFL university classrooms. In addition, the study indicated that the most frequently reported purposes of using Arabic in EFL university classrooms were to show differences between Arabic and English, to present new words, to make humorous comments, to present information about the target culture, to develop a good rapport with learners, and to provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear.

Keywords:

L1 Use; University Instructors; Attitudes and Practices; EFL

Introduction

Due to the influence of the “monolingual approach” to language teaching, the use of the learners’ first language (L1) in foreign language (FL) teaching and classroom interaction has been looked at negatively and even prohibited in FL classrooms throughout much of the 20th century. This approach (e.g., Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Learning and Teaching) maintains that the main goal of FL instruction should be to enable the learners to communicate using the target language (TL). To achieve this goal, this approach asserts that the TL should be used as a means of instruction and communication in the classroom, without reference to or use of the learners’ L1. This was justified on the basis that it would maximize learners’ exposure to the TL (following the process of L1 acquisition), avoid the negative transfer from the learners’ L1, and proclaim the significance of TL in satisfying learners’ communicative needs (Kim Anh, 2010, P. 120). Consequently, many EFL teachers who followed the monolingual approach insisted on the use of only the TL in the classroom, reprimanded the students for using their L1, and even fined the students a small amount of money for its use (Nazary, 2008; Pablo et al., 2011.)

In the past two decades, however, the monolingual approach has been criticized for a number of reasons. First, it was criticized for its impracticality. According to Cook (2001), the L1 exists in learners’ minds, and it is practically impossible to exclude it from the FL classroom. Second, some scholars claim that it has been based on political and economic grounds, rather than on sound pedagogical ones. For example, Hall and Cook (2013, p. 8) attribute the support for this approach to its use in classes in which learners speak a variety of native languages, the employment of native English-speaking teachers who may not know the learners’ L1, and publishers’ promotion of monolingual course books that could be

used by these teachers and marketed globally. Third, the validity of its goal (i.e., developing the communicative competence of the students) has also been questioned. As Davies (2003) and Seidlhofer (2013) maintain, this goal is, for many learners, not necessarily useful or desirable since they need to use English with other non-native speakers of English.

Meanwhile, there has been an increasing attention to the role of the learners' L1 in the EFL classroom. Many linguists and researchers assert that it plays an important and facilitating role in the FL learning process. For example, it is, as Levine (2014) states, an invaluable asset just as "the textbooks, the teacher, and the cultural production of the learners' new language" (p. 346). Likewise, Pablo et al. (2011) mention that the findings of their study clearly show the facilitating and natural role of the learners' L1 within the learning process; "it also provides a certain level of safe space for understanding the learning process and empathizing with students' learning needs" (p. 125). It is considered, according to Manara (2007, p. 145), the learners' L1 as the learners' linguistic schemata. In other words, it is a resource for learners to draw their background knowledge and understand the target language. Moreover, the findings of several previous studies (as the following the review of literature reveals) have indicated that many EFL teachers use it for various purposes inside the EFL classroom. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude, as Mohebbi and Alavi (2014, p. 66) state, that the learners' L1 could be employed effectively for different reasons and that it is imperative that EFL teachers need to recognize the efficacy of using it in teaching EFL.

Thus, it is clear that the use of the learners' L1 in teaching EFL has been a controversial issue for a long time and is still far from settled. Some linguists and instructors are against its use and assert that language teaching should take place exclusively in the target

language, while others emphasize that it facilitates students' learning of the foreign language and use it for a variety of purposes. Therefore, the present study intends to explore the attitudes of university instructors towards the use of Arabic in EFL classrooms and find out how often and for what purposes they use it in their classes.

Review of literature

During the past few decades, several research studies have been conducted in different FL settings with the aim of finding out teachers' attitudes towards the use of learners' L1 in the teaching of EFL and identifying the specific purposes for which it could be used in the classroom.

The results of the studies that focused on the attitudes of teachers (e.g., Al-Buraiki, 2008; Kayaoglu, 2012; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Mahmutoglu & Kicir, 2013; Sharma, 2006; Tang, 2002) have revealed that the majority of teachers were positive towards the use of L1. More specifically, most of the teachers who participated in Al-Buraiki's (2008) study were of the opinion that the use of the learners' L1 aids students in acquiring fluency and facilitates their acquisition of the English language. In the study conducted by Kayaoglu (2012), the findings also revealed that teachers view the use of Turkish as a motivating factor in students' language learning. Similarly, the Korean-speaking teachers who participated in Kim and Petraki's (2009) study reported that the use of the learners' L1 is often useful. The findings of Mahmutoglu and Kicir's (2013) study showed that Turkish should be 'sometimes' used in English classrooms. Sharma's (2006) study showed that more experienced Nepali teachers expressed a higher need for the use of the learners' L1 in English classes than did the less experienced ones. According to Sharma, this could be attributed to the fact that experienced

teachers have already perceived the practical benefit of using the learners' L1 in teaching. Finally, the results of Tang's (2002) study indicated that most instructors used Chinese in their English classes and that they had positive reactions toward its use.

In addition, the review of previous studies shows that teachers use the learners' L1 for various pedagogical purposes. First, it used to give instructions in order to help the learners achieve the goal of classroom activities (Afzal, 2012; Al-Buraiki, 2008; Hidayati, 2012; Pablo et al., 2011; Sharma, 2006; Zacharias, 2003). Second, teachers employ it to explain complex grammar rules in order to save time and avoid lengthy explanations in the TL (Hidayati, 2012; Kayaoglu, 2012; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Macaro, 2005; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014; Pablo et al., 2011; Sharma, 2006; Zacharias, 2003). It should also be used, as Mahmutoğlu and Kicir (2013) state, to show the differences between the grammatical systems of the L1 and the TL. Third, many previous studies (Afzal, 2012; Al-Buraiki, 2008; Balabakgil & Mede, 2016; Hidayati, 2012; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Macaro, 2005; Mahmutoğlu & Kicir, 2013; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014; Pablo et al., 2011; Sharma, 2006; Zacharias, 2003) reported teachers' use of L1 to teach new vocabulary items, especially abstract and difficult words, since it is more direct and time-saving than inductive teaching techniques. For example, the studies of both Afzal (2012) and Liu (2008) revealed that providing English definitions with L1 equivalents facilitated students' learning and memorization of new words. Fourth, it is used to manage the classroom (Kayaoglu, 2012; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014). Finally, other studies (Balabakgil & Mede, 2016; Cook, 2001; Hidayati, 2012; Kayaoglu, 2012; Macaro, 2005; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014) point out teachers' use of L1 in establishing good rapport with the students.

Furthermore, some studies have been carried out in the Arabic context to determine teachers' attitudes towards L1 (Arabic) use and

the purposes for which it is used in EFL classrooms. Most of these studies (e.g., Ahmed, 2015; Al-Alawi, 2008; Al-Hadrhami, 2008) have been conducted on elementary and secondary school teachers. On the other hand, few studies (Al-Amir, 2017; Alshammari, 2011; Shuchi & Islam, 2016; and Sipra, 2013) have been carried out to reveal EFL university instructors' attitudes towards and practices of using L1 (Arabic) in EFL classes. Following is a detailed review of each of these studies.

Al-Amir (2017) investigated Saudi university teachers' perceptions of the use of students' first language in the EFL classroom as well as the areas of language teaching they believe L1 should be used in. The participants were 31 female teachers with different English language proficiency levels. A teachers' questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents towards the use of learners' L1 in EFL classes. The data obtained showed that the majority of teachers agreed to the use of Arabic in their EFL classrooms. In addition, there was no significant correlation between teachers' English language proficiency level and their perceptions of L1 use. The results also revealed that the teachers believed that the use of the students' native language is necessary when explaining administrative information, giving instructions and discussing assignments as well as lowering students' psychological barriers. With regard to the areas of language teaching where the subject matter is involved, the teachers believed that L1 should be used to check students' comprehension and to explain new words. The researcher concluded that the teachers were selective with regard to the areas of language teaching in which L1 should be used.

Alshammari (2011) conducted a study that investigated the use of Arabic in English classes at two Saudi technical colleges. More specifically, the study examined the purpose of using Arabic in the

EFL classroom and the attitudes of Saudi teachers and students towards its use. The researcher used two questionnaires to collect the data. The results showed that nearly 69% of the teachers and 61% of the learners reported that Arabic should be used in their EFL classes. About 60 percent of the teachers agreed that the use of Arabic reduces the time consumed in class, and the majority of them reported that it should be used to explain new ideas and concepts. Although the majority of the teachers believed that Arabic should not be used to present new words, 54% of the students believed that its use is beneficial in explaining new vocabulary items. The researcher concluded that a balanced and judicious use of Arabic in the EFL classroom is useful to the language learning process and may even be essential to increase learners' comprehension.

Shuchi and Islam (2016) analyzed the attitudes of students and teachers towards the use of learners' mother tongue in EFL classrooms. The study was conducted at the two universities in Dhaka and two universities in Saudi Arabia. Two questionnaires—a students' questionnaire and a teachers' questionnaire—were used to elicit information from the respondents. The findings of the study revealed that a) the majority of the teachers in both countries supported the use of L1 in the target language classroom, b) there was consistency regarding the views of both teachers and students about the use of L1, c) the majority of the teachers supported the moderate use of L1, depending on the occasion, context, level and necessity of the learners, and d) the student were against the complete avoidance of the use of L1 since it may impede their learning. The researchers concluded that a judicious and moderate use of L1 does not hinder learning; it rather assists and facilitates the teaching and learning process and provides the teacher with an effective pedagogical tool for maximizing the learning outcomes.

Sipra (2013) investigated the contribution of the use of Arabic as a teaching aid and a resource in teaching EFL. The participants in the study were 150 students from King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and 25 teachers who were teaching these students. Two questionnaires were used to check and evaluate the attitudes and responses of both the teachers and the learner; one was given to the teachers and the other was given to the students. In addition, the researcher conducted classroom observations of five teachers to determine the frequency and occasions of L1 use by both the teachers and the students. The analysis of the collected data revealed that the use of L1 plays an important role in the teaching and learning of EFL at the intermediate level. The majority of teachers indicated that the translation of abstract words, complex ideas, and phrases into L1 is a facility to learn a foreign language. In addition, a vast majority of the students (97.9%) desired use of L1 in the EFL classroom. The researcher concluded that the use of the learners' L1 facilitates the learning of EFL.

All in all, most of the literature on the use of L1 suggests that it can have a constructive and facilitating role in teaching EFL; however, it recommends that it should be used judiciously, according to the students' level of mastery of the TL .

Research questions

It is clear that the issue of using the learners' L1 in the teaching of EFL is still a controversial subject. Some teachers believe that it can play an important and facilitating role inside the EFL classroom and, therefore, use it for various purposes. Others are against its use and believe that it should be excluded from EFL classrooms. Furthermore, the previous review of literature indicates that few studies have been conducted on university instructors' perceptions and use of Arabic in the EFL classroom. Therefore, the present study

has been carried out to cast light on this issue. Specifically, the study aims at answering the following questions:

.١ What are the attitudes of university instructors towards the use of the learners' L1 (Arabic) in the EFL classroom?

.٢ How often and for what purposes do university instructors use Arabic in their EFL classes?

Method

Participants

Responses were received from 32 instructors (24 males and 8 females) from three universities (AL-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Fayoum University, and Menoufia University). All respondents were native speakers of Arabic, and they came from 5 Arab countries (21 Egyptians, 5 Saudi Arabians, 4 Jordanians, 1 Moroccan, and 1 Tunisian). As table 1 shows, the vast majority of them (27) had a PhD degree, and 5 held a Master's degree. The academic rank of the respondents was as follow: 2 professors, 6 assistant professors, 19 lecturers, and 5 assistant lecturers. As for the academic specialty, 12 of them were TEFL specialists, 12 were English Literature specialists, 5 were Linguistics specialists, and 3 were specialists in Translation. With respect to the years of teaching experience, more than half of them (18) had a teaching experience of more than 20 years, 8 had taught between 11 and 20 years, 5 had taught between 6 and 10 years, and only one had less than 5 years of teaching experience. The vast majority of them (29) reported teaching learners at intermediate to advanced levels and 3 reported teaching learners at beginner to pre-intermediate levels.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants

Academic Degree		Academic Rank			Academic Specialty					Years of Experience				Level of students taught	
Master	Doctorate	Assistant Lecturer	Lecturer	Assistant Prof.	Professor	TEFL	Linguistics	English Literature	Translation	1-5	6-10	11-20	20+	Beginner to Pre-Intermediate	Advanced
5	27	5	19	6	2	12	5	12	3	1	5	8	18	3	29
% 15.63	84.38	15.63	59.38	18.75	6.25	37.50	15.63	37.50	9.38	3.13	15.63	25.00	56.25	9.37	90.63

Data for the present study were collected through a questionnaire developed by the researcher that inquired into university instructors' attitudes towards the use of L1 in teaching EFL as well as the purposes for which they use it inside the classroom. The questionnaire begins with some items that ask about the respondent's professional qualifications and experience (academic degree, rank, specialty, and teaching experience). Following this, the questionnaire is divided into two main parts. The first part comprises 14 Likert-scale items that inquire into the respondents' attitudes towards the use of the learners' L1 in teaching EFL. It represents 14 arguments about L1 use in teaching EFL (three general arguments, six arguments for the use of L1, and five against its use). The respondents were required to indicate, on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," the degree they agree or disagree with these arguments. They were also requested to specify if they believe in any other arguments for or against L1 use.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of 20 Likert-scale items about the potential uses of the learners' L1 in EFL classes. Several items of this part were adapted from Mohebbi and Alavi' (2014) questionnaire. The respondents were requested to indicate, on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from "always" to "never," the extent they use L1 in their EFL classes to achieve the purposes listed in the questionnaire. In addition, they were asked to specify other purposes for which they use L1 in their classes.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was presented to three experienced TEFL university professors who stated that its items are clearly written and straightforward. Therefore, this questionnaire is considered valid for the purposes of the present study. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix (A).

Data collection and analysis

In order to collect data for the present study, the questionnaire was distributed through email and personal contact to EFL university instructors. Out of the 70 questionnaires distributed, only 32 were returned. The returned questionnaires were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

In order to answer the first research question about the instructors' attitudes towards L1 use, the frequencies of the participants' responses to the first part of the questionnaire were calculated for each choice in each item. These frequencies were then changed into percentage scores (as presented in Appendix B) in order to facilitate the comparisons between the instructors' responses to the different arguments included in this part.

To answer the second research question, which deals with the frequency and purposes of L1 use by EFL university instructors, the frequencies of the participants' responses to the second part of the questionnaire were calculated for each choice in each item. These frequencies were then changed into percentage score (as presented in Appendix B). Following this, a total percentage score was calculated for the "always," "often," and "sometimes" choices that the instructors gave to each item. This score was calculated in order to determine the most frequently reported uses by the instructors.

Results

This section presents the results revealed by the quantitative analysis of the participants' responses to the questionnaire items. They are represented following the order of the research questions. At first, the results pertaining to university instructors' attitudes towards L1 use were presented. This is followed by the results related to the instructors' purposes of using L1 in their classes.

Instructors' attitudes towards the use of Arabic in EFL university classrooms

In order to answer the first research question about the attitudes of instructors towards L1 use, the data were obtained from the instructors' responses to the items included in the first part of the questionnaire. These items required the participants to indicate the degree they agree or disagree with three general arguments about the use of the learners' L1 in the EFL classroom, six arguments for its use, and five arguments against its use. The total percentage scores of the instructors' responses to the different choices for each item in this part of the questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

With regard to the instructors' responses to the general arguments, the data presented in Table 2 shows that more than two-thirds of the instructors (68.76%) strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "English should be the only language used in the classroom," which suggests that they reject the use of L1 in their classes. However, all of them confirmed (71.88% strongly agreed and 28.12% agreed) that "English should be the main language used in the classroom." In addition, three-quarters of them (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that the learners' L1 should be used only at certain points of a lesson.

Table 2

Item No.	Arguments	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
General Arguments:						
1.	English should be the only language used in the classroom.	34.38	34.38	3.13	12.50	15.63
2.	English should be the main language used in the classroom.	71.88	28.12	0.00	0.00	0.00
3.	The learners' L1 should be used only at certain points of a lesson.	31.25	43.75	6.25	6.25	12.50
Arguments Supporting L1 Use:						
4.	Learners like to use their L1 in class.	25.00	43.75	15.63	12.50	3.13
5.	Comparing the learners' L1 and the FL helps students to acquire the FL.	9.38	46.88	15.63	15.63	12.50
6.	L1 use helps learners relate new English language knowledge to their existing L1 knowledge.	6.25	37.50	18.75	18.75	18.75
7.	L1 use helps learners work together.	0.00	31.25	18.75	31.25	18.75
8.	L1 use makes learners less anxious.	6.25	40.63	31.25	6.25	15.63
9.	Conveying meaning through the learners' L1 is useful because it saves time.	6.25	28.13	18.75	28.13	18.75
Arguments against L1 Use:						
10.	Learners like to use their L1 in class.	25.00	43.75	15.63	12.50	3.13
11.	Comparing the learners' L1 and the FL helps students to acquire the FL.	9.38	46.88	15.63	15.63	12.50
12.	L1 use helps learners relate new English language knowledge to their existing L1 knowledge.	6.25	37.50	18.75	18.75	18.75
13.	L1 use helps learners work together.	0.00	31.25	18.75	31.25	18.75
14.	L1 use makes learners less anxious.	6.25	40.63	31.25	6.25	15.63

The analysis of the six arguments supporting L1 use indicates, as it can be seen in Table 2, that the majority of instructors agreed or strongly agreed with only two of these arguments. Specifically, more than two-thirds of them agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “learners like to use their L1 in class” (item 4), and a slight majority of them (56.26%) agreed or strongly agreed that comparing the learners’ L1 and the FL helps students to acquire the FL (item 5). On the other hand, they showed relatively negative attitudes towards the statement “L1 use helps learners work together” (item 7). While half of them disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, only 31% of them agreed with it.

However, the analysis of the instructors’ responses to the other three arguments does not reveal a clear trend; while some instructors considered them as veiled arguments for L1 use, others considered them invalid. Specifically, whereas 43.75% of them agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “L1 use helps learners relate new English language knowledge to their existing L1 knowledge,” 37.50% disagreed or strongly disagreed with it (item 6). Similarly, nearly half of them (46.88%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “L1 use makes learners less anxious,” whereas 21.88% disagreed or strongly disagreed with it (item 8). In addition, 34.38% of them agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “conveying meaning through the learners’ L1 is useful because it saves time,” while 46.88% disagreed or strongly disagreed with it (item 9).

While the majority of instructors agreed or strongly agreed with only two of the six arguments supporting L1 use, the majority of them agreed or strongly agreed with all the arguments that discourage its use. As table 2 indicates, the vast majority of them (90.63%) agreed or strongly agreed that L1 use reduces the opportunities for learners to listen to and understand English (item 13), and 87.75% strongly agreed or agreed that it reduces the opportunities for learners to speak and practice English (item 14). Likewise, 71.88% of them strongly agreed or agreed that L1 use slows down the process of acquiring English (item 10) and stops learners’ thinking in English (item 12). Finally, 68.76% of them agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that L1 use leads to interference (negative transfer) from the L1 into English (item 11).

Instructors’ use of Arabic in EFL university classrooms

The second research question deals with the frequency and purposes of using the learners' L1 by EFL university instructors. In order to answer this question, the data were collected from the participants' responses to the items included in the second part of the questionnaire. This part includes 20 items that require the participants to indicate, on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from "always" to "never," the extent they use Arabic in their classes to achieve the listed purposes. The most frequently reported purposes for which university instructors use Arabic inside their EFL classes were determined by calculating a total percentage score for the "always," "often," and "sometimes" choices that the instructors gave to each item. These scores are presented in Table 3, ordered from the highest to the lowest.

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that 68.75% of the instructors reported using Arabic (sometimes, often, or always) to show differences between Arabic and English, and 65.63% of them reported using it to present new words, particularly abstract words. Almost two-thirds of them (62.50%) reported using it to encourage and comfort learners; the same percentage confirmed using it to make humorous comments. Similarly, the use of Arabic to present information about the target culture was confirmed by 59.38% of the instructors, and its use to develop a good rapport with learners and classroom atmosphere was confirmed by 56.25% of them. A slight majority of them (53.13%) reported using Arabic to provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear. Finally, the use of Arabic to discuss administrative issues or to deal with discipline problems in class was confirmed by half of the instructors.

Table 3

Total Percentage Scores for the “Always,” “Often,” and “Sometimes” Choices

Item No.	I use Arabic to:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Total
9.	show differences between Arabic and English	3.13	9.38	56.25	68.75
3.	present new (unfamiliar) words, particularly abstract words	3.13	18.75	43.75	65.63
18.	encourage and comfort learners	9.38	6.25	46.88	62.50
20.	make humorous comments	9.38	18.75	34.38	62.50
10.	present information about the target culture, particularly when discussing cross-cultural issues	6.25	6.25	46.88	59.38
19.	develop a good rapport with learners and classroom atmosphere	9.38	6.25	40.63	56.25
5.	provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear	9.38	6.25	37.50	53.13
15.	discuss administrative issues such as course policies, announcements, deadlines, etc.	3.13	9.38	37.50	50.00
16.	deal with discipline problems in class	9.38	9.38	31.25	50.00
1	give instructions for assignments and activities	0.00	3.13	43.75	46.88
17.	establish or assert authority in class	9.38	6.25	31.25	46.88
2.	provide information about the objectives and the steps of tasks	0.00	3.13	34.38	37.50
6.	convey meaning in order to save time in lengthy task explanations	3.13	3.13	31.25	37.50
4.	explain complex grammatical points	6.25	9.38	15.63	31.25
8.	supervise and guide learners when performing a task collaboratively	3.13	3.13	25.00	31.25
7.	check learners' comprehension	3.13	6.25	18.75	28.13
12.	give oral feedback and explain learners' errors	3.13	3.13	18.75	25.00
14.	answer possible questions at the end of class	3.13	0.00	21.88	25.00
13.	give feedback on written work	3.13	0.00	15.63	18.75
11.	discuss assignments, quizzes, and tests	3.13	3.13	9.38	15.63

Table 3 also shows that the least frequently reported purposes of using Arabic were in the following order: to discuss assignments, quizzes, or tests

(15.63%); to give feedback on written work (18.75%); to give oral feedback and explain learners' errors or to answer possible questions at the end of class (25.00%); to check learners' comprehension (28.13%); to explain complex grammatical points or to supervise and guide learners when performing a task collaboratively (31.25%); to provide information about the objectives and the steps of tasks or to convey meaning in order to save time in lengthy task explanations (37.50 %); and to give instructions for assignments and activities or to establish or assert authority in class (46.88 %).

Discussion

The main purposes of the present study were to explore university instructors' attitudes towards the use of Arabic and the purposes for which they use it in their EFL classes. This section presents a discussion of the results presented in the previous section with regard to each of the two research questions.

Instructors' attitudes towards the use of Arabic in EFL university classrooms

The first research question seeks to find out the attitudes of university instructors towards the use of Arabic in their EFL classes. The data were obtained from the instructors' responses to the first part of the questionnaire, which required them to indicate the degree they agree or disagree with 3 general arguments about the use of L1 in the EFL classroom and 11 arguments for and against its use in class.

The responses that the instructors gave to the three general arguments clearly show that they all believed that English should be the main language used in the EFL classroom. The most probable reason for this is that they want to maximize the learners' exposure to the target language in class since they have limited chances for this outside the classroom. Even though more than two-thirds of them were against the use of Arabic in class, three-quarters of them confirmed that it should be used only at certain points of a lesson. A possible interpretation for this contradiction is that they believe that the use of Arabic is inevitable; so, they allow its use only at certain points of the lesson.

The data obtained from the participants' responses to the arguments for and against L1 use were also consistent with their responses to the general arguments. In general, while the majority of them confirmed only two out of the five of the arguments supporting L1 use, they confirmed all of the six

arguments discouraging its use. More specifically, it was found that most of them believe that learners like to use Arabic in class and that making comparisons between Arabic and English helps the students to acquire the English language. On the other hand, the majority of them were seen to hold the view that the use of Arabic inside the classroom results in several disadvantages. First, it reduces the opportunities for learners to listen, understand, speak, and practice English inside the classroom. Second, it slows down the process of acquiring English and stops learners' thinking in English. Third, it leads to negative transfer from Arabic into English. In sum, these results indicate that the majority of EFL university instructors who participated in the present study share more negative than positive attitudes towards the use of Arabic in their classes.

In the researcher's opinion, the most probable reason behind this is the fact that the vast majority of them reported teaching learners at intermediate to advanced levels, not beginner to pre-intermediate level students. This interpretation is supported by the findings of many previous studies (e.g., Balabakgil & Mede, 2016; Hall & Cook, 2013; Kayaoglu, 2012; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Manara, 2007). For example, Hall and Cook (2013) state that the majority of survey respondents believed that L1 use "is more appropriate with lower-level learners than higher-level students" (p. 19). Similarly, Manara's (2007) study revealed that "most of the teachers have the opinion that only the beginning level students need the mother tongue help" (p. 156).

The findings that the present study revealed concerning the attitudes of university instructors towards L1 use in EFL classes are in line with those reported by Hall and Cook (2013) and Hidayati (2012). According to Hall and Cook (2013, P. 17), the vast majority of the teachers who participated in the study were of the opinion that English should be the main language used in the classroom. Similarly, Hidayati (2012) states that "most of the teachers have the tendency to lean towards monolingual teaching, but there is still room for the use of the mother tongue in the classroom activities" (p. 153).

However, these findings are different from those of many previous studies (e.g., Al-Buraiki, 2008; Kayaoglu, 2012; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Mahmutoğlu & Kicir, 2013; Sharma, 2006; Tang, 2002) that revealed that the majority of teachers were positive towards the use of L1. They are also

different from those of previous studies conducted in the Arabic context (Al-Amir, 2017; Shuchi & Islam, 2016) that found out that the majority of instructors supported the use of Arabic in their EFL university classrooms.

Instructors' use of Arabic in EFL university classrooms

In order to answer the second research question, a total percentage score was calculated for the “always,” “often,” and “sometimes” choices that the instructors gave to the items included in the second part of the questionnaire. When these scores were ordered from the highest to the lowest, it was found that the most frequently reported purposes of using Arabic inside the EFL classroom were in the following order: to show differences between Arabic and English, to present new words (particularly abstract words), to make humorous comments, to encourage and comfort learners, to present information about the target culture, to develop a good rapport with learners, and to provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear.

The finding that the majority of EFL university instructors who participated in the present study reported that they use Arabic to show differences between Arabic and English is similar to Mahmutoğlu and Kicir's (2013) findings. According to Mahmutoğlu and Kicir (2013, P. 31), the teachers who participated in the study specified that Turkish should be used to describe the similarities and differences between the Turkish and English.

The second most frequently reported purpose of using Arabic is its use when presenting new words, particularly abstract words. This finding is in line with many previous studies (Afzal, 2012; Al-Buraiki, 2008; Balabakgil & Mede, 2016; Hidayati, 2012; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Macaro, 2005; Mahmutoğlu & Kicir, 2013; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014; Pablo et al., 2011; Sharma, 2006; Zacharias, 2003) that reported teachers' use of the learners' L1 to teach new vocabulary items, especially abstract and difficult words, since it is more direct and time-saving than inductive teaching techniques. The use of Arabic to teach new English vocabulary items is also reported in many similar studies conducted in the Arabic context; namely, Al-Amir (2017), Shuchi and Islam (2016), and Sipra (2013). On the other hand, this finding contradicts the findings reported by Alshammari (2011) who found

that the majority of the teachers believed that Arabic should not be used to present new words.

The present study also revealed that the majority of instructors reported that they use Arabic to make humorous comments, encourage and comfort learners, and develop good rapport with learners. These findings are consistent with those of many previous studies (Balabakgil & Mede, 2016; Cook, 2001; Hidayati, 2012; Kayaoglu, 2012; Macaro, 2005; Mohebbi & Alavi, 2014) that found that teachers use L1 for friendly talk with the learners or making humorous comments in order build good rapport with them. With regard to the studies conducted in the Arabic context, the instructors who participated in Al-Amir's (2017) study reported that the use of Arabic is necessary for lowering students' psychological barriers.

It was also found that the majority of instructors use Arabic to provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear, which is consistent with the studies conducted by Balabakgil and Mede (2016) and Pablo et al. (2011). As Balabakgil and Mede (2016) state, "the judicious use of L1 to teach the target language is welcomed and favored both by native and non-native instructors for various purposes such as clarifying TL meaning" (P. 31). Similarly, the teachers who participated in the study of Pablo et al. (2011) indicated that they employ the learners' L1 as a device for clarifying aspects within the classroom. This finding also supports the findings of the studies carried out by Alshammari (2011) and Sipra (2013) in the Arabic context. For example, the majority of teachers Alshammari's (2011) study stated that they often use Arabic to explain aspects of the English language that cannot be understood unless Arabic is used for more clarification.

Unlike previous studies that investigated teachers' use of the learners' L1 in EFL classrooms, the present study indicated that one of the most frequently reported purposes of using L1 in EFL university classes is its use to present information about the target culture.

Limitations and suggestions for further research

This study has two main limitations that should be taken into account. The first is related to the limited number of participants. Thus, further research could be conducted with a larger sample size in different instructional contexts in order to get a better understanding of university

instructors' perceptions of and reasons for the use of L1 in EFL classrooms. The second limitation is related to the instrument used in the study. Clearly, the study is based on data gained from a questionnaire and not on samples of actual classroom interaction; so, it suffers from the limitations inherent in questionnaires. It would be interesting, therefore, to replicate the present study using the questionnaire developed in this study in addition to follow-up interviews and classroom observations. Such research could help in establishing a broad framework for the judicious use of the learners' L1 in EFL university classes. Further research is also needed to investigate the attitudes of both students and instructors towards L1 use and compare these attitudes with actual classroom observations.

Conclusion and implications

The present study intended to investigate university instructors' attitudes towards the use of the learners' L1 in the EFL classroom. In this regard, the results of the study revealed that all instructors were of the opinion that English should be the main language used in the classroom and that L1 should be used only at certain points of a lesson. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the use of L1 in EFL university classes should be moderate, selective, and judicious. Even though EFL university learners need to get the maximum exposure to English in the classroom, there are some situations where L1 use could facilitate and enhance their learning of the target language.

The study also showed that EFL university instructors share more negative than positive attitudes towards the use of the learners' L1 in EFL classes, which is most probably attributable to the fact that the majority of participants in this study reported teaching learners with intermediate to advanced English language proficiency. This finding implies that the learners' level of mastery of the target language is one of the most important factor that determines the amount of L1 use inside EFL classrooms. Thus, it is recommended that EFL university instructors vary the amount of their L1 use according to students' level of language proficiency. Specifically, the higher students' level of English is, the less the learners' L1 should be used. Given the fact that many linguists and researchers have recently emphasized the important and facilitating role that the learners' L1 plays in the FL learning process, it is also recommended that EFL university instructors reconsider and change their attitudes towards L1 use in their classes.

This study also aimed to explore the purposes for which EFL university instructors use the learners' L1 in their classes. The results obtained from the study indicates that the majority of instructors use the learners' L1 for a variety of purposes, even though they share more negative than positive attitudes towards its use in EFL classes. In this regard, it is suggested that EFL university instructors can take advantage of the learners' shared L1 in order to 1) illustrate the differences between L1 and TL, 2) present new words, especially abstract words, 3) encourage and comfort learners or make humorous comments in order build good rapport with them, and 4) provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear.

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Appendix "A"

L1 Use Questionnaire

Dear Colleague:

The researcher is conducting a research on the use of the learners' native language in teaching of English as a foreign language. This questionnaire asks about your perceptions and use of the learners' L1 in TEFL. Your answers are confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

About Your Professional Context

1- \) University where you work:

2. Highest academic degree:

Bachelor's degree Master's degree Doctorate degree

3. Academic rank:

Instructor Lecturer Assistant Prof. Associate Prof. Professor

4. Academic Specialty:

TESOL/TEFL Linguistics English Literature Translation

5. Number of years you have been teaching English:

1-5 6-10 11-20 +20

6. English language level of the learners you teach most often:

Beginner to Pre-intermediate Intermediate to Advanced

Part One:

This part deals with your opinion about L1 use in the EFL classroom. Please mark the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. *(Tick ONE box for each item)*

Arguments	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<u>General Arguments:</u>					
1. English should be the only language used in the classroom.					
2. English should be the main language used					

in the classroom.					
3. The learners' L1 should be used only at certain points of a lesson.					
<u>Arguments Supporting L1 Use:</u>					
4. Learners like to use their L1 in class.					
5. Comparing the learners' L1 and the FL helps students to acquire the FL.					
6. L1 use helps learners relate new English language knowledge to their existing L1 knowledge.					
7. L1 use helps learners work together.					
8. L1 use makes learners less anxious.					
9. Conveying meaning through the learners' L1 is useful because it saves time.					
Other (please specify):					
a)					
b)					
<u>Arguments against L1 Use:</u>					
10. L1 use slows down the process of acquiring English.					
11. L1 use leads to interference (negative transfer) from the L1 into English.					
12. L1 use stops learners' thinking in English.					
13. L1 use reduces the opportunities for learners to listen to and understand English.					
14. L1 use reduces the opportunities for learners to speak and practice English.					
Other (please specify):					

a)					
b)					

Part Two:

This part presents the ways that EFL instructors might use the learners’ L1 in class. Please mark the extent to which you use Arabic in your EFL class. *(Tick ONE box for each item)*

I use Arabic to:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. give instructions for assignments and activities					
2. provide information about the objectives and the steps of tasks					
3. present new (unfamiliar) words, particularly abstract words					
4. explain complex grammatical points					
5. provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear					
6. convey meaning in order to save time in lengthy task explanations					

7. check learners' comprehension					
8. supervise and guide learners when performing a task collaboratively					
9. show differences between Arabic and English					
10. present information about the target culture, particularly when discussing cross-cultural issues					
11. discuss assignments, quizzes, and tests					
12. give oral feedback and explain learners' errors					
13. give feedback on written work					
14. answer possible questions at the end of class					
15. discuss administrative issues such as course policies, announcements, deadlines, etc.					
16. deal with discipline problems in class					
17. establish or assert authority in class					
18. encourage and comfort learners					

19. develop a good rapport with learners and classroom atmosphere					
20. make humorous comments					
21. Other (please specify):					
a)					
b)					
c)					

Thank you for completing the questionnaire; your help is invaluable.

Appendix "B"

Percentage Scores for Instructors' Responses to the Questionnaire

Part One:

Item No.	Arguments	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
General Arguments:						
1.	English should be the only language used in the classroom.	34.38	34.38	3.13	12.50	15.63
2.	English should be the main language used in the classroom.	71.88	28.12	0.00	0.00	0.00
3.	The learners' L1 should be used only at certain points of a lesson.	31.25	43.75	6.25	6.25	12.50
Arguments Supporting L1 Use:						
4.	Learners like to use their L1 in class.	25.00	43.75	15.63	12.50	3.13
5.	Comparing the learners' L1 and the FL helps students to acquire the FL.	9.38	46.88	15.63	15.63	12.50
6.	L1 use helps learners relate new English language knowledge to their existing L1 knowledge.	6.25	37.50	18.75	18.75	18.75
7.	L1 use helps learners work together.	0.00	31.25	18.75	31.25	18.75
8.	L1 use makes learners less anxious.	6.25	40.63	31.25	6.25	15.63
9.	Conveying meaning through the learners' L1 is useful because it saves time.	6.25	28.13	18.75	28.13	18.75
Arguments against L1 Use:						
10.	Learners like to use their L1 in class.	25.00	43.75	15.63	12.50	3.13
11.	Comparing the learners' L1 and the FL helps students to acquire the FL.	9.38	46.88	15.63	15.63	12.50
12.	L1 use helps learners relate new English language knowledge to their existing L1 knowledge.	6.25	37.50	18.75	18.75	18.75
13.	L1 use helps learners work together.	0.00	31.25	18.75	31.25	18.75
14.	L1 use makes learners less anxious.	6.25	40.63	31.25	6.25	15.63

Part Two:

Item No.	I use Arabic to:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1.	give instructions for assignments and activities	0.00	3.13	43.75	25.00	28.13
2.	provide information about the objectives and the steps of tasks	0.00	3.13	34.38	25.00	37.50
3.	present new (unfamiliar) words, particularly abstract words	3.13	18.75	43.75	21.88	12.50
4.	explain complex grammatical points	6.25	9.38	15.63	40.63	28.13
5.	provide clarification when meanings in English are unclear	9.38	6.25	37.50	34.38	12.50
6.	convey meaning in order to save time in lengthy task explanations	3.13	3.13	31.25	21.88	40.63
7.	check learners' comprehension	3.13	6.25	18.75	18.75	53.13
8.	supervise and guide learners when performing a task collaboratively	3.13	3.13	25.00	25.00	43.75
9.	show differences between Arabic and English	3.13	9.38	56.25	18.75	12.50
10.	present information about the target culture, particularly when discussing cross-cultural issues	6.25	6.25	46.88	18.75	21.88
11.	discuss assignments, quizzes, and tests	3.13	3.13	9.38	34.38	50.00
12.	give oral feedback and explain learners' errors	3.13	3.13	18.75	25.00	50.00
13.	give feedback on written work	3.13	0.00	15.63	21.88	59.38
14.	answer possible questions at the end of class	3.13	0.00	21.88	34.38	40.63
15.	discuss administrative issues such as course policies, announcements, deadlines, etc.	3.13	9.38	37.50	21.88	28.13
16.	deal with discipline problems in class	9.38	9.38	31.25	18.75	31.25
17.	establish or assert authority in class	9.38	6.25	31.25	18.75	34.38
18.	encourage and comfort learners	9.38	6.25	46.88	9.38	28.13
19.	develop a good rapport with learners and classroom atmosphere	9.38	6.25	40.63	18.75	25.00
20.	make humorous comments	9.38	18.75	34.38	15.63	21.88