

The Use of L1 in English as a Foreign Language Classes: Insights from Iraqi Tertiary Level Students

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ABSTRACT

Two main opposing approaches exist regarding the impact of first-language (L1) use in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language: the monolingual and bilingual approaches. Some linguists assume that students' L1 should be banished from their English classes, whereas others assert that it facilitates the process of learning a target language. The purpose of this study was to investigate learners' attitudes towards the use of L1 in their English classes, both by the students themselves and by their teachers. The current study also determined which factors caused the learners to switch from the TL to their L1. This study was conducted at Salahaddin University, Erbil, at the end of the first semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. It employed a mixed-method approach of data collection and analysis. Two hundred and fifty-eight EFL learners participated in the quantitative data collection, by completing a questionnaire and the qualitative data were collected via face-to-face semi structured interviews with eight EFL learners. The findings revealed that participants had a slightly positive attitude towards the use of their L1 in the facilitation of their TL learning. By referring to current theories of TL acquisition and reviewing recent literature, it can be inferred that learners' L1 has a necessary and facilitating role in acquiring a foreign language under certain conditions.

INTRODUCTION

English language plays an important role in almost every aspect of modern life, therefore, the interest of learning English as a second/foreign language has grown for the last few decades (Hasman, 2000). In addition, English has become a universal language, lingua franca. People with different cultures and linguistic backgrounds communicate for many purposes through English. Further, English has become "a key part in educational strategy in most countries" (Graddol, 2006, p. 70). However, the increasing need for learning a second/foreign language has brought significant attention to % teaching methods and approaches, therefore, the medium of instruction and the role of L1 has become one of the most important issues that should be taken into consideration. In this regard, two main opposing approaches exist regarding the impact of L1 use in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language: the monolingual and bilingual approaches. Some experts (Ellis, 1984; Krashen, 1982; Yaphantides, 2009) consider the use of L1 as a hindrance in the target language (TL) learning process. On the other hand, there are others (Atkinson, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Deller & Rinvolutri, 2002; Phillipson, 1992; Prodromou, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Vanderheijden, 2010; Weschler, 1997) who see learners' L1 as a facilitating tool in learning the TL.

Throughout the history of EFL instruction, numerous teaching methods have been employed in order to aid the learning process. The first recognized method, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), particularly emphasizes the use of learners' L1 in improving their second-language acquisition. Freeman (1986) described GTM as strictly depending on the use of L1 in all communication and explanation occurring between educators and learners. The method involves the translation of all instruction-related sentences and vocabularies into the learners' L1, with learners' success being measured by how successful these translations may be.

Although GTM is the oldest English-language teaching method and has received due criticisms, some educators still utilize it because they are unable to teach effectively in the TL. A later-developed method which is completely opposite to GTM is known as the Direct Method. It prohibits the use of L1 in interactions occurring between learners and their teachers. Other less polarized teaching methodologies in terms of L1 use are the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, Audio-Lingual Method and Silent Method, which allowed L1 use only in the facilitation of language-learning on an as-needed basis.

Therefore, with respect to these different approaches and methods and their view of the use of L1 in EFL classes, the

aim of this study was to unearth learner attitudes towards the use of L1 in EFL classes. More specifically, this study examined the perspectives of EFL learners at Salahaddin University regarding the use of their native language in their EFL classes. For this purpose, the following research questions were constructed:

1. What are the attitudes (reasons and opinions) of EFL learners towards the use of L1 in English classes at Salahaddin University?
2. What do learners think of the teachers' use of L1 in their EFL classes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature concerning L1 use in EFL classrooms is divided into three sections. The first section provides a historical background of the issue. The second section pertains to teachers' attitudes towards L1 use in EFL classes (i.e. their perceptions towards the use of L1 in learning a target language), and the last part emphasizes the necessity of acknowledging learners' attitudes towards L1 use in their classes.

A Historical View of the Issue

Auerbach (1998) explained that general opinion regarding L1 use in EFL classrooms has regularly shifted among scholars. Several hundred years ago, L1 use was a nearly universal issue and was accepted. Bilingual teaching methods employ the L1 and prioritize written communication over verbal. However, later during the 19th century, emphasis shifted toward spoken language as monolingual teaching became prevalent. Due to the mass migration of people globally, especially from Europe to America, student demographics among EFL learners changed and teachers no longer necessarily shared a common L1 with their students, who now were mixed in terms of their L1 (Hawks, 2001). Consequently, for many teachers the medium of teaching became the target language (TL).

Phillipson (1992) stated that, during the colonial teaching period, English became the predominant culture of the British colonies and the people who had moved to America. These individuals were forced to assimilate in order to obtain a better life. Thus, the English language gained its superiority over other languages. It also led to the standardization of an "English-only" policy in classrooms. Pennycook (1994) explained that economic as well as political factors played a significant role in the rise of the monolingual approach, as did the preference for native English speakers as teachers.

The monolingual approach was supported by Phillipson (1992). He believed that the TL should be the only means of communication in the classroom in order to increase TL exposure for students. He proffered the following five key "policies" of successful language teaching:

1. English must be taught in a monolingual classroom.
2. The ideal teacher is a native English speaker.
3. The earlier English is taught, the better.
4. The more English used in the classroom, the better.
5. If other languages are used, English standards will drop (Phillipson, 1992, p. 185).

The above policies led to the development of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, which dominated modern language teaching. This approach strictly follows the monolingual approach in its claim that language exists for communication. Many linguists who follow this approach believe that the TL should be the sole medium of instruction in the classroom (Wringe, 1989).

Nunan (as cited in Pacek, 2003) stated that many researchers now believe that seeking a perfect language-teaching method for all situations is futile. Many methods can be used in different situations and settings. If teachers exclude students' L1 from their learning, they will sacrifice numerous techniques for teaching the TL.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Using L1

Many studies have focused on teachers' perceptions and justifications for L1 use in their English classes. Krieger (2005) stated that in a multilingual classroom, using the L1 is not the essential means of interaction. He also mentioned that it makes students feel that they can depend on their native language for communication rather than facilitating TL acquisition. He thought that students use their L1 even when they are not allowed by their teachers. He also believed that teachers should do their best to help students determine when to use their L1 and when to avoid this use.

Lin (2005) elaborated the issue of how learners' attitudes are affected by the teachers' use of learners' native language. He determined that that an "English-only" policy is more important in classes with students majoring in English than one in classes with non-major students. Almost all the teachers agreed to use the L1 with non-major students. This study demonstrated that the teachers used their L1 in different ways (as single words and complete sentences). The study also indicated that the amount of teachers' L1 use depended on students' levels. They used students' L1 more frequently with elementary students than with relatively more advanced students such as university students.

Al-Hadhrami (as cited in Borg, 2008) conducted a study on the use of Arabic in English classes and how it affected the learning process. He held interviews with EFL teachers and observing their classes. The study demonstrated that teachers utilized the L1 in translating new ideas, concepts, and vocabulary terms as well as for classroom management and instructional purposes. Similarly, Al-Buraiki (2008) conducted a study on teachers' perceptions of their L1 use in English classes. The results were similar to those of previous studies, as giving instructions and explaining new concepts and vocabularies were the main reasons behind L1 use. Most participants (teachers) believed that L1 use can aid students in acquiring fluency and it can facilitate English language acquisition. They also thought that L1 use is a time-saving technique, as it takes a longer time to clarify concepts in the TL.

Kim and Petraki (2009) conducted a study of teachers' perspectives regarding L1 use. The research took place in Vietnam and utilized a mixed method of data collection by incorporating questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. Two types of English teachers were examined:

native and non-native English teachers. The research determined that native English teachers used students' L1 less frequently than did non-native English teachers. On the other hand, both teachers and students agreed that students' L1 can be used while presenting new vocabularies and expressions, explaining grammatical points and managing classrooms.

Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) implemented a study in Iran which examined the amount of L1 use in EFL classes. The research investigated two teachers using two different ELT methodologies. The first teacher based his teaching on GTM, relying on translation from the TL to the students' L1. Therefore, L1 use was quite high. The other teacher utilized CLT, and L1 use was remarkably lower than with the first teacher. The teachers stated that the students' parents gave priority to obtaining high grades over language acquisition itself. In this case, the teachers were forced to use the L1 rather than the TL.

Hidayati (2012) conducted a study of the use of the Indonesian language. The aim of the study was to determine the nature of the correlation between L1 use and students' participation as well as comprehension in EFL classes. The teachers who participated in the study used the L1 about 30-49% of class time. The study showed a positive correlation between the amount of time using the L1 and students' interactions. When teachers spent a high amount of time using the L1, the interactions were high, and vice versa. The study did not find any new reasons behind students' use of their L1. The results were similar to those of previous studies. Teachers had used the L1 to explain grammar points, present new vocabularies and facilitate social interactions with and among students.

Learners' Attitudes Towards Using L1

Learners' attitudes regarding L1 use is valuable, as they are directly involved in learning the TL. Nevertheless, their views have not been sufficiently examined, especially in Iraq. They usually are not considered alone, but rather in connection with their teachers' attitudes. Satio and Ebsworth (2004) conducted a study of L1 use among Japanese students. The students preferred teachers who know their native language because they found L1 use to be helpful. They wanted their teachers to explain ideas and present new vocabularies in their native language. The study also indicated that the students were shocked while being taught by native English speakers who did not allow them to use the L1 in their classes.

Sharma (2006) conducted a study of the use of the Nepali language in Nepal's secondary schools. The study concentrated on the frequency of L1 use and the attitudes of teachers and students regarding L1 use. The study showed that students employed their L1 more frequently than teachers did (ranging from 52-64%). Only one percent of the students wished their teachers to use their L1 frequently during class. The research exhibited some contradictory results among students due to various points of view. About 46% of the learners thought that the L1 should be used in about 5% of class time. Nevertheless, the study indicated a negative correlation between their wishes and their deeds, as the learn-

ers tended to use their native language more frequently than they had wished.

Hung's (2006) study of students' attitudes towards L1 use in a writing class at a university in Taiwan found that the learners believed their teachers should use the L1 to explain grammatical points, brainstorm ideas and explain difficult concepts. The learners also believed that the use of L1 should not comprise more than 25% of class time. They thought that if teachers were to use the L1 frequently in their writing classes, their attention to the teachers would be less. Nazary (2008) conducted a study of students' attitudes towards L1 use among Iranian University students. The study indicated that the learners did not prefer to use their L1 in English classes. Moreover, learners with various proficiency levels had different perceptions towards the use of L1. On the other hand, about 72% of the learners preferred to have a teacher who could speak their native language. Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz's (2011) study of L1 use in EFL classes involved low- and high- level students of English. Both levels of students agreed that the interactions should be in English and not in their native language.

Another study conducted by Afzal (2012) on the effect of L1 on active and passive vocabularies indicated opposite results. The study indicated that when Persian equivalents are provided in addition to English definitions, the vocabularies became more active. Alshammari (2011) conducted a study concerning the use of Arabic among university-level EFL learners. The results showed that approximately 61% of the learners thought that Arabic should be used in their EFL classes. Moreover, nearly 69% of the teachers had the same idea. Nearly 54% of the students thought that L1 use is beneficial in terms of explaining new vocabularies, while 5% thought that the L1 is useful when giving instructions. Most of the teachers shared the belief that L1 use is time-saving. An interesting point is that 21% of the participants (both teachers and students) thought that the L1 should always be used in EFL classes. Finally, in his study concerning teacher attitudes, Hidayati (2012) determined that 36% of learners believed that the L1 should be used for nearly 30% of class time. Students claimed that they became confused and, consequently, disinterested when English was over-used in their classes.

In a different context, Koucka (2007) examined L1 use by teacher trainers. Her study indicated that teacher trainers used the L1 too frequently. She also determined that the teacher trainers used L1 in fourteen different situations ranging from lesson introductions to providing feedback. The study also indicated that the L1 was used more when giving instructions and translating new words than in any other situation.

In a different foreign language context, Campa and Nasaji (2009) conducted a study concerning the teaching of German as a foreign language in Canada. Two classes of two different teachers were videotaped and audio-recorded. The aim of the recordings was to identify situations in which the L1 (English) was used by the two teachers. The most common situation was translation from German to English. Checking the meaning of new words was also another situation, as was the comparison between the two languages. Giving instruc-

tions, classroom management and interactions between the students and the teachers took place in the L1. The study showed that L1 use was also influenced by students' culture. When discussing something related to the students' culture, the teachers used the learners' L1. The research also showed that an experienced teacher used the L1 less frequently than did the novice teacher.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research is a descriptive study which considers the frequency of each item in terms of gender and grade. The study follows a mixed method of data collection and analysis in order to obtain more reliable results. The data were gathered from two different methods: a) the quantitative data were collected via Learners' Attitudes towards L1 Use Questionnaire (LATL1UQ) consisting of two parts; reasons and opinions, and b) the qualitative data were collected through face-to-face Semi Structured Interviews (SSIs) with participants. The answers were transcribed verbatim and analyzed via content analysis.

Participants

Participants included 258 randomly-selected English as a foreign language (EFL) students at Salahaddin University, all of whom possessed the same linguistic background in English. 61.2% (N=158) of the participants were female, while 27.9% (72) were male. About 11% (N=28) of the participants did not state their gender. Participants' ages were between 17 and 31 years with the mean of 21.8 years.

Instruments

Two main tools were employed to secure data for the current study: LATL1UQ as a quantitative technique and the SSIs as a qualitative one. Below is a detailed description of both tools.

Learners' attitudes towards L1 use questionnaire (LATL1UQ)

The first phase of data collection was a LATL1UQ which was developed by Al Sharaeai (2012). The first part of the LATL1UQ addressed ten reasons behind learners' use of their L1. The participants were asked to rate the frequency of each reason in terms of "always", "usually", "sometimes" and "never". The second part of the LATL1UQ consisted of ten learners' opinions regarding L1 use in their EFL classes. The participants were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each opinion.

Semi structured interviews (SSIs)

The second phase of data collection involved face-to-face Semi Structured Interviews (SSIs). Dee Leeuw (2005) states that conducting interviews is the oldest method of data collection, and Cresswell (2009) states that interview questions can build a connection between the researcher and partici-

pants. Interviews also can help the researcher to gain deeper insight into participants' views on the concerned issue. This phase consisted of eight questions pertaining the same topics which had been discussed in the survey. The participants of this study were asked to state how long they had been studying English, in what types of situations did they use their L1 in class and what did they think about a teacher using their L1 to teach English. The SSIs provided the qualitative data to gather insights into participants' attitudes towards the use of L1 in their classes.

Data Collection Procedure

The quantitative data were collected at the end of the first semester of the 2016-2017 academic year during regular class hours. The LATL1UQ was implemented in the English language only. It was distributed to 258 students who had demonstrated interest in participating in the research. The researcher administered to participants a brief orientation regarding the aims of this study. They were informed that the study was only for academic and research purposes. All 258 distributed LATL1UQ were returned complete.

On the other hand, the qualitative data were collected from learners who had demonstrated interest in being interviewed. Only eight learners were selected for the SSIs, and they represented all four grades of study—two learners in each grade. All the SSIs were conducted in English. They were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

As the present study employs a mixed research method (i.e. quantitative and qualitative), the results of the LATL1UQ (i.e. the quantitative data) were analyzed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the most common reasons and opinions among learners' points of view (in other words, analyzing frequencies). On the other hand, the SSIs (i.e. the qualitative data) were analyzed by transcribing the SSIs and then content analysis was subsequently employed for analysis of data. The content analysis was done by two MA holders in EFL independently and results were cross-checked for reliability.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis

The first research question regarded the most and least common reasons concerning learners' use of their L1 among EFL learners at Salahaddin University. To analyze this research question, the mean of each individual reason was considered. As a result, the most and least common reasons were determined. Table 1 shows the findings of the most common reasons by EFL learners at Salahaddin University.

As seen in the Table 1 above, checking the meaning of a new word or concept during the lesson constituted the most common reason behind learners' use of L1 compared with the other reasons (M=2.58). In addition, talking about personal things with classmates (M=2.53) and classmates start

talking to each other in their L1 while they are working on a task (M=2.51) were also among the most common reason. On the other hand, inability to think of the words in English (M=2.02) was the least common reasons behind EFL learners' use of L1 at Salahaddin University.

On the other hand, the most and least frequent opinions of EFL learners concerning their use of L1 in EFL classes at Salahaddin University were analysed by considering the mean of each individual opinion. As a result, the most and least opinions were determined. Table 2 shows the findings of the most common opinions by EFL learners at Salahaddin University.

As seen in the Table 2 above, it's not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks constituted the least common opinion on learners' use of L1 compared with the other opinions (M=3.19). In addition, I think I speak in my first language more often than I speak English in English classes (M=2.92) and I would pre-

fer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English classes (M=2.90) were also among the least common opinions. On the other hand, as my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English classes (M=2.18) and in English classes, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language (M=2.19) were the most common opinion behind EFL learners' use of L1 at Salahaddin University.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This section analyses and reports the findings of the qualitative data. The qualitative data were collected through the SSIs with eight EFL students at Salahaddin University. The participants represented all four grades of study in an % department. Students One and Two represented freshmen, Students Three and Four represented sophomores, Students Five and Six represented juniors and Students Seven and

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Most Common Reasons Behind Using L1

Reasons	Mean
I speak my first language in English classes because I need to check the meaning of a new word or concept during the lesson.	2.58
I speak my first language during English classes when	2.53
I talk about personal things with my classmates.	2.52
I speak my first language in English classes because my classmates start talking to me in my first language while we are working on a task.	2.51
I speak my first language in English classes because I want to chat with my classmates about topics that may not be connected to class.	2.46
In English classes, I speak my first language with other members of my group who speak my first language because we want to finish class activities faster.	2.36
I speak my first language in English classes because I need to ask a classmate to explain a point in the lesson for me.	2.27
I speak my first language in English classes because I cannot think of the correct word in English when talking to my classmates.	2.22
I speak my first language in English classes because I am explaining a new point in the lesson to a classmate.	2.14
I speak my first language with my classmates during English classes because it makes me feel more connected to my culture.	2.08
Because I can't think of the words in English, I speak in my first language, even when others may not understand me	2.02

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Most Common Opinions behind Using L1

Opinions	Mean
It's not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.	3.19
I think I speak in my first language more often than I speak English in English classes.	2.92
I would prefer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English classes.	2.90
Having to speak English only in class makes me feel nervous.	2.82
Speaking my first language with my classmates between and during class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.	2.67
I want to be able to speak my first language in English classes when I feel I need to.	2.47
I think my English classes should have an "English-only" policy." (This means only English is allowed in the English classroom.)	2.40
Using dictionaries and resources in the first language should be allowed in English classes.	2.28
In English classes, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language.	2.19
As my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English classes.	2.18

Eight represented seniors. The SSIs questions were comprised of eight different questions that were rewordings of the LATL1UQ items.

As mentioned earlier, eight EFL learners who demonstrated their interest in being interviewed participated in the qualitative data collection (i.e. the SSIs). Each grade was represented by two participants. The learning time-period of the interviewees varied—some of them had just begun learning English, while others had been studying English for ten years. All the SSIs participants were males. The qualitative analyses provide answers to the first two research questions as stated in chapter 1 part 4.

Research question 1: What are the reasons behind the use of L1 in EFL classes at Salahaddin University?

The first research question aimed at determining learners’ reasons for utilizing their L1 in classes. All the participants stated that they sometimes use their L1 during English lessons regardless of their grades and levels of proficiency. Table 3 displays an example of the codes, extracts and themes of learners’ use of L1 in English classes.

Table 3 demonstrates that EFL learners at Salahaddin University tend to use the L1 for three different reasons: to clarify grammatical points, to express themselves properly as well as during translation classes.

Clarifying grammatical points

Numerous language experts have discussed the relationship between learners’ L1 and the TL in terms of universal grammar. Chomsky (1976) explained that all the present languages in the world share a number of grammatical structures. Therefore, knowledge from learners L1 can be transferred into TL acquisition. Further, Ringbom (1987) asserted that learners use their own grammatical knowledge to understand the grammar of the TL. In addition, transferring knowledge

from the L1 to the TL is a strategy utilized by almost all foreign language (FL) learners in most situations (Atkinson, 1987; Harbord, 1992; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1992).

In this regard, the results of the SSIs display that two out of the eight participants stated that they need to use L1 in grammar classes. They think that they do not understand all the grammatical points in the TL, and sometimes they suggest that their teachers should make linguistic comparisons between the two languages. The participants use compensation strategy while facing difficulties in expressing themselves in the TL.

Extract 4.1

Participant 3 “When I have grammar classes I have to use my native language sometimes. Because there are some things that should be clarified in my first language and the teacher of grammar sometimes has to compare between the grammar of English and the grammar of my native language.

Extract 4.2

Participant 4 “I think it is necessary to use your first language when explaining a rule in grammar.”

To better express themselves

Oxford (2000) viewed the learners’ use of L1 as a useful tool to compensate the shortcomings in both comprehension and production stages. Therefore, learners can comprehend and produce the TL despite the shortcomings through using their L1. In this regard, L1 serves as a facilitating tool in the process of becoming more proficient users of the TL.

Similarly, the results of the SSIs demonstrate that six of the interviewees mentioned that they use their native language when they cannot properly express themselves in the TL and when they face difficulties in communicating with

Table 3. Themes of learners’ use of L1

Code	Extracts	Themes
Learners’ use of L1	Participant 3 “When I have grammar classes I have to use my native language sometimes. Because there are some things that should be clarified in my first language and the teacher of grammar sometimes has to compare between the grammar of English and the grammar of my native language.	To clarify grammatical points
	Participant 4 “I think it is necessary to use your first language when explaining a rule in grammar.”	
	Participant 6 “In cases that you cannot express yourself in the English language.”	
	Participant 8 “In situations that are complex to me to explain the subject.”	To better express themselves
	Participant 5 “When I do not know the English word.”	
	Participant 1 “I’m using my first language when I do not understand some questions from the teacher.”	
	Participant 2 “Sometimes I have a question to ask my teacher and I don’t know how to ask in the second language (L2).”	
	Participant 1 “I’m not very good in English that’s why I use my native language.”	
	Participant 6 “... for example you have translation lesson, you have to talk in your first language.	

their teachers in the TL because of their low proficiency levels. Below are some extracts.

Extract 4.3

Participant 6 “In cases that you cannot express yourself in the English language.”

Extract 4.4

Participant 1 “I’m using my first language when I do not understand some questions from the teacher.”

Extract 4.5

Participant 2 “Sometimes I have a question to ask my teacher and I don’t know how to ask in the second language.”

Extract 4.6

Participant 1 “I’m not very good in English that’s why I use my native language.”

To translate

Furthermore, translation classes require the use of the L1. Translation is taught during the third and fourth grades of English study at Salahaddin University. Thus, a third-year student mentioned that they are obliged to use their L1 while attending translation classes.

Extract 4.7

Participant 6 “... for example you have translation lesson, you have to talk in your first language.

Research question 2: What do EFL learners think of the teachers’ use of L1 in EFL classrooms at Salahaddin University?

The second research question aimed at determining learners’ beliefs towards their teachers’ use of L1. All participants stated that their teachers use the L1 in their classes regardless of grade or class. Table 4 displays the themes of learner’s beliefs towards teachers’ use of L1 in English classes.

As Table 4 illustrates, the results of the SSIs demonstrate that teachers’ use of learners’ L1 could be beneficial in three different circumstances: while explaining grammatical points, to help low-proficient learners to be more proficient users of English and exposing learners to the TL as much as possible. On the other hand, teachers’ use of learners’ L1 might distract learners’ attention from the process of learning the TL. In this regard, this section displays the results of the SSIs on learners’ perspectives on teachers’ use of L1.

Explaining grammatical points

The results of the SSIs demonstrate that two of the interviewees believed that teachers’ use of L1 is useful for explaining grammatical points. Further, they suggested that

their teachers should refer to their L1 background and make linguistic comparisons while teaching grammar. Below are some extracts.

Extract 4.8

Participant 4 “It is really useful. Using my native language for grammar is necessary.”

Extract 4.9

Participant 3 “The teacher of grammar sometimes has to compare between the grammar of English and the grammar of my native language.”

Low-proficient learner

Wilkins (1974) suggested that using learners’ L1 is sometimes beneficial especially when the use of the TL causes confusion and ambiguity. The results of the SSIs support the use of L1 for low-proficient learners to facilitate the TL learning process. One of the interviewees mentioned that it is useful because of his low proficiency in the TL.

Extract 4.10

Participant 2 “Yeah, I think it’s useful because my English is not advanced. I think it is better to us.”

Exposing Learners to the TL

Auerbach (1993) asserted that one assumption of English Language Teaching (ELT) is that learners acquire the TL more quickly and effectively the more they are exposed to the TL, in which case they begin to think in the TL. Therefore, it decreases learners’ dependency on the L1. The results of the SSIs show that an interviewee suggests that their teachers should expose learners to the TL and he believes that they should use only English to improve learner’s language skills.

Extract 4.11

Participant 1 “Finally, I would like to say to my teachers to use only the second language because it is better for us for learning English language.”

Distracting Attention

On the other hand, two of the participants believed that the use of L1 distracts their attention in English classes. One of them thought that using the L1 alongside the TL is like doing two different things at the same time, which he felt to be inappropriate.

Extract 4.11

Participant 7 “It’s distracting because we shift from one language to another language. It’s just like doing to different things.”

Table 4. Themes of learners' beliefs towards teachers' use of L1

Code	Extracts	Themes
Advantages of teachers' use of L1	Participant 4 "It is really useful. Using my native language for grammar is necessary."	Explaining grammatical points
	Participant 3 "The teacher of grammar sometimes has to compare between the grammar of English and the grammar of my native language."	
	Participant 2 "Yeah, I think it's useful because my English is not advanced. I think it is better to us."	Low-proficient learners
	Participant 2 "I think it is better to us."	
Disadvantages of teachers use of L1	Participant 1 "Finally, I would like to say to my teachers to use only the second language because it is better for us for learning English language."	Exposing learners to the TL
	Participant 7 "It's distracting because we shift from one language to another language. It's just like doing two different things."	
	Participant 8 "Teachers' use of L1 is wrong."	

DISCUSSION

The first research question aimed at determining learners' reasons for utilizing their L1 in classes. The results of the LATLIUQ suggest that the learners hold a slightly positive attitude towards L1 use in English classes on an as-needed basis. Generally, this finding corresponds with that of previous studies conducted by (Al-Buraiki, 2008; Al Shammari, 2011; Campa & Nasaji, 2009; Hidaytati, 2012; Hung, 2006; Kim & Petraki, 2009) which similarly conclude that participants hold favourable attitudes towards L1 use in EFL classes.

In the quantitative component of this study, the LATLIUQ was administered to examine participants' attitudes towards L1 use in EFL classes. The findings of the first research question have demonstrated that most participants are in favour of using the L1 to check the meaning of an unknown word or concept during an English class. The results correspond with those of Huang (2006) who indicated that there is a general agreement that learners' L1 is commonly used to deal with unknown words or concepts while teaching and learning EFL.

Furthermore, the findings of Hidayati's (2012) indicate that the participants stated that they widely use their L1 in social interactions while talking about personal things with their classmates as well as the case with the current study. The results of the LATLIUQ and the SSIs suggest that EFL learners at Salahaddin University commonly use their L1 for talking about personal things with their classmates. In addition, the findings of Campa and Nasaji (2009) support those of the current study. They conducted a study concerning the teaching of German as a second language (L2) in Canada. Two classes of two different teachers were videotaped and audio-recorded. The aim of the recordings was to identify situations in which the L1 (English) was used by the two teachers. The most common situation was translation from German to English. Similarly, the results of the LATLIUQ and the SSIs demonstrate that learners' L1 is also widely used to translate from the target language to L1, especially during translation lessons. The findings of the current study

are in line with the findings of Hidayati (2012). The results of the current study reveal that L1 is used to facilitate social interactions with and among students.

Similar to research in literature (Kim & Petraki, 2009; Huang, 2006; Khati, 2011), EFL learners at Salahaddin University believe that the use of their L1 is beneficial and necessary for explaining grammatical points and in comparing learners' L1 with the TL during English classes. In this regard, Bolitho (1983) stated that EFL learners attend English classes with the pre-existence of their L1 in their minds; thus, ignoring their L1 during English classes is unjustified. Campa and Nasaji (2009) discovered that teachers employ learners' L1 to compare the two languages as a means of facilitating TL learning. Similar to Bolitho (1983) and Campa and Nasaji (2009), the participants of the current study stated in the SSIs that their teachers should compare their L1 with the TL in order to booster understanding of the TL.

The second research question investigated the views of EFL learners at Salahaddin University concerning their teachers' use of L1 in their English classes. L1 use is viewed as a compensation strategy. Oxford (1990) stated that learners utilize their L1 as a way to overcome their shortcomings while communicating in the TL. In this light, L1 plays a prominent role in facilitating the TL learning process.

The findings of the second research question are similar to those of previous studies (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004; Hung, 2006; Nazary, 2008; Khati, 2011; Alshammari, 2011). Despite the different contexts in which these studies were conducted, the results indicate that EFL learners generally have a positive attitude concerning their teachers' use of L1 in their English classes. Further, Nazary (2008) emphasized that learners do not prefer to speak in their L1, yet at the same time they prefer to have a teacher who can understand their L1. Khati (2011) believed that EFL learners can use their L1 as needed to facilitate the TL learning process. The findings of Saito and Ebsworth (2004) support those of the current study. They determined that learners prefer to have a teacher who can understand their L1. They believe that the teachers' use of L1 is helpful and beneficial. In this regard,

the results of the LATLIUQ demonstrate that the participants of this study hold the same opinion.

CONCLUSION

The current research investigated learners' attitudes towards the use of their first language in English classes at Salahaddin University. It also attempted to determine any statistically significant differences between males and females and among the four grades of study. Furthermore, the study determined the most common reasons for L1 use among participants, focusing as well on learners' opinions towards the use of L1 in their classes.

A mixed-method approach was employed for data collection. 258 English as a foreign language (EFL) students were surveyed to obtain the quantitative data, while eight EFL learners were interviewed to collect the qualitative data. In light of the research questions specified in chapter 1 part 4, the obtained data from the Learners' Attitudes towards L1 Use Questionnaire (LATLIUQ) were analysed and interpreted into percentages by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative data were transcribed and analysed via content analysis.

The results of the current study indicate that EFL learners had slightly positive attitudes towards the use of L1 when it aimed at facilitating target language (TL) learning, especially for low-level learners. The participants stated that if the L1 is excessively used, it distracts their attention from learning the TL; therefore, it minimizes learners' exposure to the TL and increases their dependency on the L1. The findings also revealed that the most common reason behind learners' use of L1 is to check the meaning of unknown words and phrases during their English classes as well as to understand grammatical points. Moreover, the findings showed that the participants used their L1 to make a bridge between their L1 linguistic backgrounds and the linguistic culture of the TL. In addition, talking about personal things was cited as one of the most common reasons for using the L1.

Furthermore, EFL learners at Salahaddin University had an overall positive attitude toward teachers' use of L1 in their English classes. Moreover, the learners preferred teachers who could communicate in their L1. The findings showed that participants believed that the monolingual approach, which focuses on an "English-only" policy, is not beneficial, especially among low-level learners. On the other hand, an "English-only" policy seemed to be highly favoured by high-level learners. In addition, the learners highlighted the following learning occasions during which L1 use might be beneficial—when learning new vocabularies, when attempting to understand difficult concepts and when mastering grammatical points. It might also be beneficial to raise learners' awareness of the similarities between the linguistic backgrounds of the two languages.

The findings of this study support the limited use of L1 to maximize learners' exposure to the TL. Both monolingual and bilingual approaches do not seem sufficient; instead, a more balanced approach towards L1 is needed which maximizes and recognizes the L1 as a beneficial classroom tool. Learners' L1 may be tolerated, especially among low-level

learners who lack TL proficiency. However, this use may be limited as learners gradually become more confident in using the TL.

To conclude, the present study contributes to the long-standing debate among English Language Teaching (ELT) scholars concerning monolingual and bilingual approaches by examining learners' perspectives regarding this issue. It is hoped that the findings of this study will create a better learning environment for participants which considers the roles of L1 use in EFL classrooms.

Pedagogical Implications

This study has significant pedagogical implications for learners and teachers. The findings of the current study support the limited use of L1 to maximize learners' exposure to the TL. Due to learners' limited linguistic backgrounds in the TL, low-level learners need the support of their L1 in order to be exposed to the TL. Therefore, L1 use aids learners in several circumstances.

Moreover, Prodromou (2002) believes that the use of L1 has been promoted for several procedures such as explaining difficult concepts, checking comprehension, vocabulary clarification, or raising learners' self-confidence. In this regard, the findings of the current study suggest that learners can use their L1 to understand grammatical points, especially among low-level learners and to overcome the shortcomings while communicating in the TL, which is viewed as a compensation strategy. Further, they can use their L1 to check the meaning of a new word or concept during an English lesson in order to learn faster and easier. Further, learners should expose themselves to the TL as much as possible in order to cope with learning the TL.

The findings of the current study can improve both teacher professionalism and students' performance and motivation. Classrooms that offer using L1 are probably a better environment for learning the TL, therefore, the distance between teachers and learners is reduced. However, utilizing the L1 does not mean translating all classroom activities into learners' L1. Rather, it should be viewed as a tool to be employed on an as-needed basis. When the L1 is excessively used, learners tend to believe that they cannot cope with learning the TL. Therefore, learners should be exposed to the TL as much as possible. According Newmark (1991) learners' L1 can be a valuable tool if it is used appropriately for teaching English as a foreign or second language (L2) regardless of the proficiency level of the learners. In early stages, it can be a useful tool in terms of using class time effectively and economically.

Further, similar to the findings of other studies (Satio & Ebsworth, 2004; Hung, 2006; Nazary, 2008; Khati, 2011; Alshammari, 2011), the results of the current study reveal that having a teacher who can fulfil learners' needs is crucial for providing a better classroom environment, improving learners' performance and motivation in the classroom. Therefore, teachers can use the L1 while dealing with unknown or difficult words and concepts for better comprehension. In addition, teachers can utilize these findings to help reduce the amount of L1 use in their English classes. They

also can better understand learners' attitudes towards L1 use while attending their English classes. Consequently, the results of this study may assist teachers in modifying their ELT methodologies in order to enhance their students' learning.

Finally, the findings of this study support both monolingual and bilingual approaches do not seem sufficient; instead, a more balanced approach towards L1 is needed which maximizes and recognizes the L1 as a beneficial classroom tool. Learners' L1 may be tolerated, especially among low-level learners who lack TL proficiency. However, this use may be limited as learners gradually become more confident in using the TL.

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