Bridging the gap: Saudi Arabian faculty and learners' attitudes towards first language use in EFL classes

Asma M. Almusharraf
Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia

The value of using one's first language (L1) to promote a second language (L2) learning has been thoroughly investigated in the literature. However, this study aimed to further contribute to the investigation of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction and uncover attitudes towards the use of L1 (Arabic) in face-to-face and online classrooms. This study utilised a mixed-method research design and revealed that both EFL instructors and learners are fully cognisant of the significance of L1 use to scaffold to L2 naturally and effectively. Participants reported that L1 plays a positive role in the L2 learning process. While instructors expressed learners' frustration in communicating in the English language throughout the instruction period, they reported that L1 use is likely to lead instructors to overuse L1 or learners to rely too much on their native language. Future research should be devoted to designing and planning clear expectations about the optimal level of L1 use, along with pedagogical materials and activities to promote EFL learning.

Introduction

The debate over using the first language (L1) in EFL classrooms is still a heated topic with controversial views. Throughout the literature, research either encourages or discourages the use of the L1 in EFL classrooms. Researchers who support the exclusion of the L1 claim that L2 is better learned naturally in a process that resembles L1 acquisition (Krashen, 1982). On the other hand, L1 inclusion proponents argue that L1 use can be viewed as an essential tool that facilitates L2 learning (Hall & Cook, 2012). These contrasting views in the literature and the widely held assumption that the presence of the L1 is "worrying" and more detrimental than beneficial (Brooks-Lewis, 2009) has led many instructors to avoid using L1 in their EFL classrooms or feel guilty when they find it necessary to do so (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Macaro, 2005). This guilt can even extend to learners, affecting their participation in the EFL classroom (Wang, 2019).

Although there is a wealth of research on L1 use in EFL classrooms, there is still relatively little research on L1 use in Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms, especially at the university level. Furthermore, a closer look at the literature on the use of L1 in online learning reveals several gaps and shortcomings. There has been limited research investigating instructors or learners' attitude towards L1 use in online settings. With the rapid transformation of online learning, instructors began to reinvent the whole EFL teaching experience to question to what extent and in what contexts they should make use of L1 in the online teaching of L2. Thus, this study's primary aim was to investigate further Saudi English language learners' attitudes towards the use of L1 (Arabic language) in their face-to-face and online EFL classrooms. More precisely, it examined instructors and learners' reasons for favouring or avoiding L1 use in face-to-face and online EFL classrooms. This study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the instructors and learners' attitudes towards using L1 (Arabic) in the EFL classroom?
2. What are the reasons Saudi EFL instructors and learners give to favour or avoid the use of L1 in EFL classrooms?
3. Do Saudi EFL instructors and learners' attitudes towards L1 use in the classroom vary between face-to-face and online courses?

Terminology related to L1 use

Hall and Cook (2012) distinguished between monolingual teaching, where the language is taught without reference to another language, and bilingual teaching, where instructors make use of the language learners already know. Different terminologies have been adopted relating to L1 use in the L2 classroom, yet the most general term is simply calling it "L1 use" (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Lee, 2018; Levine, 2003; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Turnbull, 2001). Other terms include codeswitching (Macaro, 2005), translanguaging (Duarte, 2019; Rowe, 2018), mother tongue use (Harbord, 1992), and own-language use (Hall & Cook, 2012).

Literature review

Theoretical background: The role of L1 in EFL classrooms

The role of L1 in EFL classrooms was marginalised in the 1980s and early 1990s. The main argument for this marginalisation is based on Krashen's theory (1982) of second language acquisition (SLA), which claims that languages are better learned naturally. The focus is on providing learners with comprehensible input and encouraging them to implement strategies for negotiating meaning without L1 use (Long & Porter, 1985). Therefore, Macaro (2005) emphasised that L1 use is considered contentious because it is assumed to cut down on the amount of learners' exposure to the L2.

According to Cummins (2007), the monolingual perspective ignores cognitive psychology that emphasises the need to activate learners' schema and prior knowledge by making secure connections with what they already know. Indeed, prior knowledge "makes learning significant" (Brooks-Lewis, 2009, p. 228) as learners fit new information to the knowledge they already possess. For that reason, L1 use is viewed as a cognitive tool that can build many scaffolding opportunities that make L2 input more accessible for learners (Brevik & Rindal, 2020; Hall & Cook, 2012).

Since the late 19th century and well into the 20th century, the use of L1 was treated less as an inconvenience and more as a welcomed resource for the process of learning and teaching another language (e.g., Cummins, 2007). Hall and Cook (2012) implicitly disapproved of the strict abandoning of learners' L1 in EFL classrooms, identifying that what is fashionable in English language teaching (ELT) theory and literature does not necessarily reflect what happens in ELT classrooms worldwide. Even though some researchers have reported that instructors feel guilty about using L1, it would be naive to deny its potential use as a natural response in bilingual situations where the instructor and

learners share the same L1 (Hall & Cook, 2012; Lee, 2018). Macaro, Tian and Chu (2018) stated that "we have now reached the point where there are virtually no commentaries made in the SLA field advocating the exclusion or even the strong limitation of the L1" (p. 2).

Studies that support L1 use

Researchers have begun to explore the value of using L1 to promote L2 learning. Studies addressing instructors and learners' perspectives on L1 use have adopted either an SLA perspective (Levine, 2003; Macaro, 2005; Macaro et al., 2018; Wang, 2019) or a sociolinguistic framework (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Duarte, 2019). These studies fall into two categories: (1) the strategic use of L1 during classroom interaction (Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) and (2) the views on L1 use in the classroom (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Levine, 2003; Macaro, 2005; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008).

Harbord (1992) pointed out that many ELT instructors have tried to create an "all-English classroom" (p. 350), but have found that they have failed to get the meaning across, leading to learner incomprehension and resentment. He concluded that "translation/transfer is a natural phenomenon and an inevitable part of second language acquisition… regardless of whether or not the teacher offers or 'permits' translation" (p. 351). A similar conclusion was reached by Kim (2020), who indicated that exclusive use of the L2 is rarely encountered in Japanese higher education, even though English-medium instruction was implemented. Many studies have confirmed that complete monolingualism in FL teaching is "undesirable, unrealistic, and untenable" (Levine, 2011, p. 70). According to Shin, Dixon and Choi (2020), research published in the last decade suggests that learners benefit more from L1 translations than from L2-only explanations. Rowe (2018) also confirmed that the two-way translation method helps make the meaning of challenging texts clear.

Since L1 use is viewed as an "inevitable" (p. 152) and "natural" (p. 152) part of classroom life, Widdowson (2003) stated that it should be considered as a pedagogical tool that is no longer viewed as an impediment to remove or avoid. Similarly, Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) argued that L1 is "the greatest pedagogical resource" (p. 13) that a learner brings to foreign language learning, as it "lays the foundations for all other languages we might want to learn" (p. 13).

Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008) mentioned that instructor use of L1 could be classified using Ellis's (1994) distinction between two types of classroom interaction: medium-oriented goals and framework goals. Medium-oriented goals are related to teaching the language itself, such as explaining the meaning of new vocabulary items or teaching grammar. Framework goals are related to managing and organising the class, giving procedural instructions, assigning homework, and planning exams. Besides these two main goals, Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney added that L1 is also used to deal with affective aspects of classroom interaction, such as establishing a positive social relationship with learners, or reducing anxiety associated with the exclusive use of L2.

Concerning L1 use in the online environment, Lee (2008) confirmed that L1 was used during online feedback negotiation "to reduce the learners' cognitive burden, keep the flow of feedback negotiation, and bring learners' attention to form within a shared communicative context" (p. 66). Such a finding is in line with Brooks and Donato (1994), who recognised that L1 use during language learning tasks is "a normal psycholinguistic process that facilitates L2 production and allows the learners both to initiate and sustain verbal interaction with one another" (p. 268). According to Fondo and Jacobetty (2020), language learners may experience anxiety in virtual environments due to their inability to properly present themselves and communicate well with others through the limitation of L2. Therefore, learners can benefit from video conferencing tools, communicative technologies, and text chats with a dictionary that supports L1 and L2.

Finally, the amount of exposure to L1 use is a crucial issue that is the concern of many researchers. Turnbull (2001) urged that instructors must not be licensed to use L1 because this might lead to the overuse of L1 and, therefore, underuse of L2 in the classroom. Turnbull recommended that it is vital to find parameters for "an optimal or acceptable amount" (p. 531) of L1 use to help instructors make decisions. Macaro (2001) reached similar conclusions and put forward the idea of a principled "framework that identifies when reference to the L1 can be a valuable tool" (p. 545). Gallagher (2020) recommended instructors to apply "critical reflection strategies and tools concerning the use of the L1 in their everyday teaching practice across various contexts" (p. 10).

L1 use in the Saudi context

In Saudi EFL contexts, English is rarely encountered outside the classroom; therefore, instructors and learners' efforts to use English are more demanding. Unlike other countries' curricula, where policymakers often suggest the maximal use of L2, the Saudi curriculum for EFL courses does not contain any direct statements prescribing English as the sole language of instruction. This does not mean that L1 use is encouraged; on the contrary, overuse of the L1 is attributed to deficiencies in acquiring and mastering L2 (Al-Seghayer, 2015).

Research on L1 use in the EFL Saudi context has asserted the facilitative role of L1 in the teaching and learning of L2. Storch and Aldosari (2010) investigated the amount and functions of L1 use in an EFL class in a college in Saudi Arabia. Their study showed that the learners' use of L1 seems to serve essential cognitive, social, and pedagogical functions. An essential problem was reported by Al Asmari (2014), who found out that university EFL instructors believed in the effectiveness of L1 use; however, they did not know about the extent of its use. Al Asmari recommended that L1 use should be selective, planned, and based on learners' needs.

Method

Research design

This study utilised a mixed-method research design to explore Saudi EFL instructors and learners' attitudes towards using their first language (Arabic) in their EFL classrooms. Specifically, the instructors and learners' reasons for favouring or avoiding the use of L1 in their EFL face-to-face and online courses were examined. To adhere to the study's research questions, closed-ended questions were used to get data quantitatively, whereas open-ended questions were used to have a qualitative view. Closed questions allowed comparability of responses, while open-ended questions provided more details and justifications for participants' choices.

Participants

Participants (92 instructors and 249 learners) were recruited from three public universities across Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that in Saudi Arabia, gender segregation is a cultural norm that is evident in most public and private education institutions. Demographic information about the instructors and learners who participated in this study is presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Table 1: Demographic information for instructors (N = 92)

		No.	%
Gender	Male	21	22.8
	Female	71	77.2
Age (years)	Below 30	4	4.3
	30- 40 years	53	57.6
	Above 40	35	38.0
Level of education	Bachelor degree	5	5.4
	Masters	26	28.3
	PhD	61	66.3
How often do you use the Arabic language when teaching EFL courses?	Never	14	15.2
	Rarely	41	44.6
	Sometimes	34	37.0
	Usually	1	1.1
	Always	2	2.2
The number of English online courses you taught	None	16	17.4
	1 to 3	56	60.9
	4 to 6	10	10.9
	More than 7	10	10.9

Table 2: Demographic information for learners (N = 249)

		No.	%
Gender	Male	58	23.3
	Female	191	76.7
Age (years)	19- 21	30	12.0
	22- 24	192	77.1
	25-27	23	9.2
	28 and above	4	1.6
How often do instructors in your university use the Arabic language when teaching English courses?	Never	10	4.0
	Rarely	80	32.1
	Sometimes	126	50.6
	Usually	24	9.6
	Always	9	3.6
The number of English online courses you attended	None	17	6.8
	Less than 5	33	13.3
	Less than 10	100	40.2
	10 and more	99	39.8

Instruments

This study is based on two questionnaires: one to measure Saudi EFL instructors' attitude towards L1 use in their EFL classrooms and another for EFL learners' attitude towards instructors' use of L1. The researcher developed these questionnaires based on in-depth analysis of similar questionnaires used in other studies (e.g., Levine, 2003; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008). Each questionnaire contained three sections. The first section asked for demographic information about the participants (e.g., gender, age). The second section elicited participants' attitudes towards L1 use on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5. The third section included open-ended questions to provide an opportunity for explanation and justification of participants' responses.

The questionnaires were reviewed by four EFL instructors, all of whom had a doctoral degree and taught in the applied linguistics field, to determine the content and construct validity. Based on the reviewers' feedback, changes were made; some items were rephrased, and others were deleted. Both questionnaires were converted to a Web format and were piloted with a small group of instructors and learners to check that all items were suitable. Internal consistency reliability was measured for each of the questionnaires. This analysis reported Cronbach's alpha values of 0.926 for the instructors' questionnaire and 0.870 for the learners' questionnaire.

The final version of the instructors' questionnaire contained 23 closed questions (Table 3), addressing instructors' opinions about the English-only classrooms, what they believe students feel about the English-only EFL classrooms, and their attitudes towards L1 use's effectiveness in their EFL classrooms. In the end, two open-ended questions were used to allow instructors to give reasons for favouring or avoiding L1 use in both face-to-face

classrooms and online classrooms (see Appendix). The final version of the learners' questionnaire contained 17 closed questions (Table 4), addressing general attitude toward L1 use, specific views on L1 use, and their attitude towards instructors who use or avoid L1 in their EFL classrooms. Two open-ended questions were used at the end of the questionnaire to ask learners to give reasons to favour or avoid L1 use in both face-to-face classrooms and online classrooms (see Appendix).

Procedures

The final versions of both questionnaires were created and distributed from March to July 2020 using Google Forms. Google Forms is a mobile-friendly platform capable of delivering the survey in both languages (i.e., English and Arabic) and ensuring that each respondent could make only one complete response to the survey. A request for participation was made through email to EFL instructors teaching in Saudi universities. The instructors' version of the survey was administered in English while the learners' questionnaire was translated into learners' L1 (Arabic) to ensure comprehension of all items. The Arabic translation was back translated to English to check the accuracy. Learners were assured that taking part in this study would not affect their grades or achievement in any subjects, they would be anonymous, and their information would remain confidential.

Analysis of the questionnaire responses was completed in two parts: a quantitative analysis of the closed statements was conducted, followed by a qualitative analysis of the two open-ended questions in both questionnaires. The participants' views on the questionnaire's statements were analysed using *SPSS* version 26, with summary measures such as means and standard deviations. The responses to the two open-ended questions in each questionnaire were analysed qualitatively. A coding scheme was established to analyse the responses of the four lists and create categories. *NVivo* version 12 was utilised to organise, manage, and track the data. To check for interrater reliability, all codes generated from the researcher's data were examined by a PhD colleague. The interrater reliability was 84%, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Results: Analysis of quantitative data

This section provides evidence from the two questionnaires regarding the attitudes towards the use of L1 (Arabic) in the EFL classrooms of the instructors and learners who participated in this study.

Results from Table 3 show that most instructors agree that learners must use English a great deal in the classroom to acquire (4.35) and master (4.38) it effectively. Moreover, most instructors participating in this study (2.78) disagreed with the statement that there are no situations in which the first language (i.e., Arabic) should be used in the EFL classroom (i.e., total immersion of English is best). However, instructors believed that, regardless of students' preference, the instructor should use the English language at all times in the classroom (3.58).

Table 3: Questionnaire items for instructors

Item		Item statement	Mean	SD
Your opinions about the English-only classroom	1	To acquire EFL, students must use English a great deal.	4.35	1.06
	2	To master EFL, students must use English a great deal.	4.38	0.98
	3	There are no situations when L1 should be used.	2.78	1.26
	4	Grammar should be taught only in English.	3.70	1.26
	5	To teach vocabulary, only English-English meaning should be used.	3.50	1.21
	6	Only English should be used by students.	3.63	1.23
	7	Only English should be used to discuss assignments and tests.	3.37	1.28
	8	Only English should be used to discuss course policies and attendance.	3.32	1.33
	9	Regardless of students' preference, only English should be used.	3.58	1.23
	10	I feel guilty when using L1.	2.93	1.30
What you believe students feel about an English-only classroom	11	Students feel anxious when only English is used.	3.82	1.13
	12	Students are frustrated using English the whole class.	3.35	1.14
	13	Students view the use of English as a rewarding and worthwhile challenge.	3.54	1.01
	14	Students feel anxious speaking only English during activities.	3.47	1.01
	15	Students feel anxious speaking only English when asking questions about grammar.	3.46	1.12
	16	Students feel anxious speaking only English when discussing vocabulary.	3.25	1.13
	17	Students feel anxious speaking only English when discussing assignments and tests.	3.54	1.15
	18	Students feel anxious speaking only English when discussing administrative information.	3.61	1.16
Attitudes towards the effectiveness of using Arabic in EFL classrooms	19	The use of L1 is normal when both the instructor and students speak L1.	2.73	1.25
	20	Some use of Arabic helps accomplish teaching tasks more successfully.	3.46	1.12
	21	Bilingual teachers can expedite the process of learning English.	3.20	1.15
	22	Telling jokes and stories is more adequate in one's L1.	3.04	1.11
	23	Using L1 creates a sense of belonging and a safe learning environment.	3.11	1.27

The results displayed in Table 3 also illustrate that instructors think that learners generally feel anxious (3.82) and find it frustrating to communicate in the English language

throughout the entire instructional period (3.35). Instructors also think that some use of L1 helps accomplish teaching tasks more successfully (3.46), expedites the process of learning English (3.20), and creates a sense of belonging and a safe learning environment (3.11).

Table 4 illustrates that learners participating in this study like to attend courses where instructors use Arabic while teaching English (3.23) and understand English better in classrooms where instructors use Arabic while teaching English (3.45). Only 28.9% agreed that L1 should never be used in EFL classrooms (3.18).

Table 4: Questionnaire items for learners

Item		Item statement	Mean	SD
General views on Arabic language use in EFL classes	1	I feel anxious when only English is used.	2.47	1.17
	2	I like to attend classes where instructors use some Arabic.	3.23	1.09
	3	I understand English better when instructors use some Arabic.	3.45	1.12
	4	I think that the Arabic language should never be used.	3.18	1.16
Specific views on the use of Arabic in EFL classes	5	I feel comfortable when instructors use Arabic to teach grammar.	3.10	1.24
	6	I feel comfortable when instructors use Arabic to teach vocabulary.	3.64	1.16
	7	I feel comfortable when instructors use Arabic to give directions.	3.06	1.16
	8	I feel comfortable when instructors use Arabic to discuss assignments and tests.	3.24	1.27
	9	I feel comfortable when instructors use Arabic to discuss administrative information.	2.92	1.26
	10	I need the use of Arabic in online classes more than face-to-face classes.	2.90	1.26
How instructors are viewed	11	I respect an instructor who uses Arabic to clarify specific points.	3.46	1.24
	12	I think instructors who use English only are more confident.	3.24	1.34
	13	I think instructors who use English only are more proficient.	3.22	1.30
	14	I think instructors who use some Arabic manage the class better.	2.87	1.30
	15	I think instructors who use some Arabic help learners learn English better.	3.81	1.06
	16	Instructors who switch from English to Arabic express themselves clearly.	3.56	1.01
	17	I feel comfortable when communicating with instructors who use Arabic.	3.44	1.09

Table 4 shows that most learners felt comfortable when instructors use Arabic in teaching new vocabulary (3.64), followed by discussing tests, quizzes, and other assignments (3.24). Moreover, Table 4 shows that learners respect instructors who use L1 to clarify specific points (3.46), think that they are trying to help learners learn English better (3.81), can express themselves clearly during classrooms (3.56), and feel comfortable communicating with them (3.44).

Results: Analysis of qualitative data - instructors

From the inductive analytic process undertaken with the instructor data, themes that represent reasons for avoiding and favouring the use of L1 in EFL classrooms were generated. These themes are listed in the following two sections, along with quotations from some of the instructors.

Reasons for avoiding the use of L1 in EFL classrooms

The following themes have emerged from the data as reasons instructors gave for avoiding the use of L1 in EFL classrooms.

Provide more exposure and practice to master L2
Instructors explained the need to replicate a fully L2-speaking environment within the classroom, which would give learners the benefit of experiencing a fulsome range of contexts within which L2 is used in the real world. For example, one instructor noted that "Avoiding L1 gives a chance to provide a rich English language environment" (I7), while another suggested that "Students need to get exposed to English in different contexts as much as possible. Using Arabic deprives them of that" (I31). Some instructors suggested the need for multi-contextual use of L2 within the classroom as essential, given that, for many, it was the only place where they could use the language. As explained by one instructor, "Students do not have enough access to use the English language outside of the classroom setting. Therefore, they need every minute in class to practice English" (I47).

Some instructors suggested that mastery of L2 best happens when learners are forced to overcome their anxiety regarding language use. For example, one instructor mentioned that "Preventing students from using Arabic in class pushes them out of their comfort zone and forcefully getting them out of their fear which always hinders any learning process" (I73).

Fear of L1 overuse or learners' reliance on L1
Many instructors made a note of their concern that excessive use of L1 in the classroom would stifle natural L2 language use. As one instructor noted, "Students should rely on English to understand, communicate, and socialise to become sufficient speakers of the language. They will feel anxious initially, but they will get used to it if the instructor is strict about L1 use" (I67). Another instructor expressed the belief that "L1 should be avoided in classes because students would naturally use it to communicate, understand, etc. I believe this will hinder the L2 learning process" (I41). Besides, according to some

instructors, the overuse of L1 might limit the development of learners' L2 lexicon. As expressed by an instructor, "Avoiding Arabic will force students to acquire new vocabularies so they can communicate with their teachers" (I5).

Reasons for favouring the use of L1 in EFL classrooms

The following themes have emerged from the data as reasons instructors gave for favouring the use of L1 in EFL classrooms.

Learners' proficiency level
Most instructors reported that the need to develop their learners' L2 proficiency level, especially those struggling with the new language, was an important reason for them to use L1 in their EFL classrooms. For example, one instructor noted that "In some occasions such as with low-level students, the instructor can use some Arabic to explain a difficult point" (I20). Another instructor explained the usefulness of using L1 for L2 proficiency development as follows:

> I think it depends on the students' level. New learners, with low English proficiency, could highly benefit from using their native tongue (Arabic) to process new words and information. However, once students reach a certain point of proficiency, using the native tongue (i.e., Arabic) can hinder their learning (I64).

Comprehension
Comprehension was a frequently recurring response from instructors as to why they used L1 for EFL instruction. Almost all instructors indicated that L1 helps to comprehend new ideas, vocabularies, and structures. As one instructor explained, "Using the Arabic language is useful in clarifying some complicated English concepts" (I8), while another instructor expanded on this point stating that "I find myself using Arabic when explaining complicated points to ensure deeper understanding. I also use Arabic in discussing test results and common errors because I want to be sure every student understood my comments" (I4).

Many instructors who supported L1 use in EFL classrooms indicated that L1 is a scaffolding tool that helps learners learn L2 better. To this point, one instructor mentioned that "It is a tool in your hands, a useful teaching aid, why not using it?" (I84).

Giving instructions
Giving instructions was another recurring reason given by instructors for the use of L1 in their EFL classrooms. For example, one instructor stated that "when it comes to rules, instructions, and tests, I use both especially if I am teaching level 3 and below because the point here is to get the message across" (I55), while another noted the following: "I use Arabic when giving exam instructions to avoid any misunderstanding" (I18). A third instructor articulated the following view that might suggest an imperative for the use of L1: "According to the sensitivity and importance of the topic like exams or first meeting instructions where speaking the target language may hinder students' understanding and thus causing later problems" (I61).

Connecting with learners

Connecting with learners was a recurring response from many of the instructors, not only to develop faculty-student rapport but also to attract their learners' attention and create a more comfortable environment. Some instructors mentioned the point that the use of L1 strengthens learners' confidence, self-esteem, and identity. One instructor explained this point as follows: "Well I feel positive toward the use of L1 in EFL classroom as I think this is the merits of being a native speaker where you can connect with your students" (I10), while another instructor opined, "I use Arabic for students to feel comfortable engaging, participating, and feeling a sense of belonging in a community" (I43). Two other instructors made a note of the value of using L1 as a means of building rapport with learners through the use of humour. One stated that "I sometimes say a joke in Arabic in the purpose of drawing the students' attention, kind of refreshing, or ice-breaking" (I60), while the other instructor noted that "I believe using Arabic attracts attention when students seem to lose track and it can be used to build rapport and for jokes" (I4).

Instructors also reported that when L1 is used, students are much more able to express their feelings and opinions, unlike when they try to do so using only L2.

Parameters for the use of L1 in EFL classrooms

Some instructors provided opinions on when, and only when, L1 should be used in an EFL classroom. One instructor expressed such constraints in the following way:

> In sum, a teacher who speaks the student's first language has an advantage that she can use when needed. But she should always remember that the English class's primary purpose is to expose students to as much English as possible. She should not deprive students of such opportunities. So, she should use Arabic carefully with full awareness. (I92)

Some instructors also indicated that L1 should only be used as a last resort. One instructor, in particular, emphasised this point by stating that "I use it only as a final choice after trying other English-English techniques" (I48). Many instructors also expressed the belief that L1 should only be used to compare between L2 and L1. For example, one instructor noted that "when it comes to writing, I sometimes prefer using little Arabic. Making students compare the syntax of Arabic and English has been beneficial" (I56), while another pointed out that an instructor "may also try to match/compare between these two different linguistics systems" (I71).

Results: Analysis of qualitative data - learners

Data from the open-ended questions on the learner questionnaire were also analysed inductively, and through the process of coding and the merging of codes, several themes were generated that provide reasons given by learners for avoiding or favouring the use of L1 in an EFL classroom. These codes and themes are presented in the following sections.

Reasons for avoiding the use of L1 in EFL classrooms

The following themes have emerged from the data as reasons learners gave for avoiding the use of L1 in EFL classrooms.

Fear of reliance on L1 and the need to become self-dependent
Learners who wanted L1 to be avoided expressed the opinion that once L1 is used, learners will rely on L1 explanations and translations. For example, one learner noted that "If instructors did not allow us to use Arabic, we will stop relying on Arabic and get used to using English only" (L59). Another learner expressed a similar view in the following way: "When the student relies on his mother tongue in understanding difficult terms, he does not strive to acquire the vocabulary of the target language" (L23). In particular, one learner expressed this opinion in a very pointed manner as follows: "For students to develop, instructors need to avoid using Arabic" (L117).

As an alternative to using L1 in the classroom, some learners believed that a modification of the L2 language could replace the need for the use of L1. As one learner suggested, "When learners encounter difficulty understanding a point, instructors should simplify the English language, but not to use Arabic" (L91). As a corollary to the idea for instructions to be presented in L1, some instructors mentioned that instructions are usually written and posted online; therefore, L1 is less needed.

Allow more practice for mastering L2
The need to allow for more practice in the use of L2 was a reason given by many of the learners for avoiding the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. These learners indicated that avoiding L1 would allow more L2 exposure and encourage them to use L2. According to one learner, avoiding the use of L1 "may help students to develop their language skills because they will use English regardless of their level. Students will try to speak and discuss in English, and if they make a mistake, the instructor will correct that mistake" (L197). Another learner suggested that because most EFL learners are exposed to Arabic only outside of the classroom, "students need an only English-speaking environment to develop and practice" (L85).

Reasons for favouring the use of L1 in EFL classrooms

The following themes have emerged from the data as reasons learners gave for favouring the use of L1 in EFL classrooms.

Comprehension
Improvement in language comprehension was the predominant reason given by learners for the need to have some use of L1 in an EFL classroom. Almost all learners who favoured L1 use indicated that L1 helped them to comprehend new ideas, vocabulary, and structures. For example, one learner noted that L1 could be used "To understand information that may be difficult to comprehend" (L12), and another suggested that learners "understand English better when Arabic is used, and the meaning sticks in the mind" (L38).

Many learners recognised the benefit that L1 has on assisting students in comprehending assignment and assessment instructions. To this point, one learner expressed the following view: "I have noticed that many colleagues do not understand everything when teachers only use the English language and thus lose opportunities to learn new vocabulary and note important instructions related to assignments or tests" (L216).

Acquiring new vocabulary
Many learners expressed a view that translating complicated terminology is vital to comprehend the general idea. According to one learner, "I understand new vocabulary better if the Arabic translation is provided" (L144). Another learner mentioned, "If the Arabic translation of difficult words is not provided, I will look for the translation in the dictionary application I have on my phone" (L118).

Parameters for the use of L1 in EFL classrooms

Similar to some of the instructors from this study, many learners believed that there should be some constraints put on the use of L1 in an EFL classroom. As some learners suggested, L1 should be used when required, but with some exceptions, only for those who are initially learning L2. As expressed by one learner, "The use of the Arabic language may create a more comfortable space for students, especially in the initial stages" (L84). Another learner pointed out that "When I was in the first levels of the university, I needed the Arabic language to learn English" (L51). Furthermore, results from coding of the instructors and learners' responses show that both groups provided similar reasons for favouring and avoiding L1 use in both face-to-face and online EFL courses, except for the absence of body language and the presence of technical problems within online learning.

Reasons for favouring L1 use in EFL online classes - instructors and learners

The following themes have emerged from the data as reasons instructors and learners gave for favouring the use of L1 in EFL online classes.

Absence of body language
Instructors and learners indicated that with the lack of body language in online learning, learners needed L1 more. One instructor mentioned that "Students can't see the lecturer or the board so it might be hard to them to catch all the information so sometimes it is necessary to use Arabic words or short phrases to grasp their attention back" (I62). Another instructor mentioned that "It is even more important for online classes to help to connect with distance learners" (I26).

When technical problems arise
While it may sound obvious, technical issues are one of the main stumbling blocks of online learning. Learners mentioned that such problems add to their frustration and reduce their engagement if L2 is only used. One learner said that "Sometimes, the teacher's voice is not very clear, and it saves time to mention important things in Arabic rather than repeating it in English" (L94). Another learner reported, "Sometimes some

tension occurs due to the sound quality in online lectures. It is desirable to use the Arabic language for clarification and checking comprehension" (L121).

Discussion

To answer the first research question: *What are the instructors and learners' attitudes towards using L1 (Arabic) in the EFL classroom?* This study has shown that all participants agreed that maximising the use of L2 is important in EFL classrooms. Moreover, results indicated that most instructors and learners favour limited use of L1 in L2 classrooms. Both instructors and learners are fully cognisant of the significance of L1 use to naturally and effectively scaffold to L2. This result is consistent with findings from other studies (e.g., Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Lee, 2018; Levine, 2003; Macaro, 2005), indicating a preference for L1 use in EFL teaching.

To answer the second research question: *What are the reasons Saudi EFL instructors and learners give to favour or avoid the use of L1 in EFL classes?* The results of this study show that instructors and learners who avoided L1 use in EFL classrooms indicated that the main argument of L1 avoidance was to provide more exposure and practice of L2 to master it. Such a view is documented in the literature. Macaro (2005) emphasised that L1 use is considered contentious because it is assumed to cut down on the amount of learners' exposure to the L2. However, Macaro indicated that "large amounts of input do not necessarily lead to the take-up of the language by the learner" (p. 66). What matters most is the quality of exposure, not the quantity. Therefore, even though L2 exposure and practice are essential, and all participants agreed upon their importance, something more important needs to be considered. Without comprehending such exposure, learners will not develop. Learners need to comprehend what is taught to learn it. Therefore, this study's results are consistent with Brooks-Lewis (2009) and Swain and Lapkin's (2000) research that L1 use is an aid in EFL teaching and learning and does not reduce students' exposure and the ability to communicate well in L2.

As presented in the results section, instructors and learners' main reason for favouring L1 use in both face-to-face and online EFL classrooms is comprehension. This result is in line with Brook-Lewis's (2009) research that indicated that prior knowledge presented in L1 use "makes learning significant" (p. 228) as learners fit new information to the knowledge they already possess. Researchers have viewed L1 as a scaffolding tool that makes L2 input more accessible to learners (Hall & Cook, 2012; Widdowson, 2003) and, more importantly, to beginners (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). Therefore, the results of this study are in line with results from research by Brooks-Lewis (2009), Butzkamm & Caldwell (2009), Storch and Aldosari (2010), and Swain and Lapkin (2000), that is, restricting or prohibiting the use of L1 in L2 classrooms is to neglect an essential pedagogical tool. However, many instructors and learners participating in the current study did not view L1 as a supportive pedagogical tool but as a tool that can be used when facing difficulties or as a final choice. Indeed, research has shown that EFL classroom pedagogy has been dominated by the assumption that L1 could be used only when problems arise and as the last resource (Hall & Cook, 2012). Nevertheless, Macaro (2005)

stated that most instructors still neglect the value of L1 in terms of cognitive development and language acquisition.

In line with other researchers' findings, L1 was avoided due to fear of L1 overuse or learners' reliance on L1 explanations. This fear was addressed, and researchers have called for optimal, acceptable, selective, principled, and judicious use of L1 in EFL classrooms (Al Asmari, 2014; Macaro, 2001; Turnbull, 2001; Wang, 2019). It seems that many instructors have not given much thought to or reflected on the issue of using the L1 in the EFL classroom. Therefore, this study stresses the importance of examining "ways that encourage reflective practice" (Almusharraf, 2020, p.546). Similar to Gallagher (2020), this study calls for instructors' reflection about when, how, and to what extent L1 can be used. Reflection could help instructors make their own professional judgments about L1 and L2 use, especially in a context as Saudi Arabia, where the curriculum for EFL courses does not contain any direct statements prescribing English as the sole language of instruction.

Even though some instructors participating in this study indicated that they never or rarely use L1, research has shown that it is challenging to avoid L1 use in an environment where instructors and learners speak the same language (Hall & Cook, 2012; Harbord, 1992; Kim, 2020). Levine (2011) indicated that many studies have confirmed that complete monolingualism in FL teaching is "undesirable, unrealistic, and untenable" (p. 70). This study's results point in a direction that portrays a positive attitude towards L1 use in EFL classrooms. Those instructors who rarely or never use L1 in their EFL classrooms admitted that learners generally feel anxious and that they, themselves, find it frustrating to communicate in English for the entire instructional period. With such frustration and anxiety, learners are less likely to utilise L2 in the classroom. In line with Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney's (2008) results, this study has shown that L1 use facilitates a positive affective environment for learning and, most importantly, reduces learners' anxiety levels and other affective barriers. The ideal EFL classroom for learners who participated in this study is one in which L1 was used wisely.

To answer the third research question: *Do Saudi EFL instructors and learners' attitudes towards L1 use in the classroom vary between face-to-face and online courses?* The results of this study offer evidence that Saudi EFL instructors and learners' attitudes towards L1 use do not vary in face-to-face classes and online courses; and that limited L1 use is preferred in both EFL face-to-face classrooms and online classes. Similar to Lee (2008), this study supports the idea that L1 can be used to provide additional support to the learning of L2. It is important to note that responses are based on the online experience, mainly from an emergency remote teaching during COVID 19 campus closures. Therefore, L1 use in online settings should be reconsidered. Instructors and learners could benefit from computer technologies, smart phones, and online communication tools that support both languages and allow simultaneous translations.

Conclusion

This study offers new insights to raise awareness of the importance of investigating L1 use in face-to-face and online settings. More importantly, communicating both instructors and learners' voices can close the gap between instructors and learners. The findings from this study raise several essential implications for EFL educators and practitioners. First, viewing L1 use as a hindrance and a distraction from effective EFL learning needs to be revisited. It is important to note that quantity matters as much as quality. Instructors need to maintain the quality by giving maximum L2 input and making it meaningful and comprehensible simultaneously.

Second, instructors need to value their learners' languages and cultures and provide activities that allow bilingual or multilingual communications. According to Rowe (2018), building dual-language or multimodal texts is a favourable activity in which learners write and record texts using both L1 and L2. Instructors' optimal use of L1 can develop closeness with learners, showing empathy and solidarity (Brevik & Rindal, 2020).

Third, the use of L1 in L2 classes may seem to be a subjective issue related to instructors' experience, learners' proficiency level, and the complexity of the skill being taught. Therefore, applying reflection strategies and tools concerning the use of the L1 in everyday teaching practice across different contexts is encouraged, to allow instructors to become more confident about their teaching choices and feel less guilty in their approach to using the L1. Reflection could lead to professional development and leadership facilitation that may be needed to allow instructors to make high-quality decisions concerning the appropriate amount of L1 use. Some reflective ways of raising instructors' awareness of L1-L2 use would be using class recordings, journal writings, and learners' feedback as a basis for systematic reflection and language use analysis.

Finally, rapid technological innovation has provided instructors and learners with opportunities to use technology for language learning. Therefore, both EFL instructors and learners should use computer technologies, mobile devices, and online communication tools to complement classroom learning and reduce the L1-L2 tensions. For example, providing learners with videos, audios, educational websites, or smart phone applications that can be accessed at learners' pace to improve their understanding and proficiency under circumstances where a learner may feel that class instruction contained exclusive L2 use or insufficient L1 use.

Although this study's results are consistent with findings from other studies from different contexts (e.g., Brooks-Lewis, 2009: Hall & Cook, 2012; Lee, 2018; Macaro, 2005), the study's sample of only Saudi university EFL instructors and learners may not be representative enough to generalise the data. However, this limitation could give direction for further studies with participants at different proficiency levels in various EFL classrooms around the globe. Future research can also focus on observational designs combined with instructors and learners' perspectives to capture genuine classroom practices linked with participants' viewpoints. Furthermore, there is still a great need for

more research investigating L1 use in online environments and how it differs from onsite environments. It is necessary for future research to explore the mediating role that computer technologies and mobile devices play in advancing L2 through L1. More evaluation of the role and use of the L1 would help instructors set clear expectations about the optimal level of L1 use and which pedagogical materials and activities should promote EFL learning.

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Appendix: Open-ended questions in the two questionnaires

Instructors' version

A.   Give reasons for favouring or avoiding the use of Arabic in EFL face-to-face classes.

B.   Give reasons for favouring or avoiding the use of Arabic in EFL online classes.

Learners' version

A.   Choose the statement that best reflects your opinion about face-to-face classes.
1- Instructors should only use English in their English language courses.
2- Instructors can be allowed to use some Arabic in their English language classes.

Give reasons for your selection:

A.   Choose the statement that best reflects your opinion about online classes.
1. Instructors should only use English in their English language courses.
2. Instructors can be allowed to use some Arabic in their English language classes.

Give reasons for your selection:

Dr Asma Almusharraf is an assistant professor at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia. She gained her PhD in Applied Linguistics with first class honours. Her research interest includes language acquisition, foreign language teaching and learning, computer-assisted language learning and professional development.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8916-6768
Email: amusharraf@imamu.edu.sa