

Exploring Sudanese Secondary Schools Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of Arabic Language in EFL Classroom

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Abstract: *This study aims at exploring teachers' views on the use of L1 in the classroom and possible reasons for the use of L1 while learning FL. To achieve the set objectives, questionnaires, and classroom observations were used to address the research questions and objectives. 100 Secondary School teachers completed questionnaires, and 7 EFL classes were observed by the researcher. The study found out that teachers use Arabic language for purposes though their uses of Arabic within English classes ranged from "rarely" to "always". It is also showed that teachers demonstrated positive attitude towards the use of L1 within English classes. Finally, based on the findings, the study recommends a limited use of L1 in: explaining vocabularies, grammar, and concepts when necessary.*

Key word: *Arabic language, Second language, First language*

I. Introduction

Several studies were focusing on the use of L1 in L2 classroom. Some advocate the use of L1 inside the classroom claiming that it can help students learning the second language. On the other hand, some believe that the use of L1 should be avoided. Few researches have been conducted on the use of Arabic language (L1) in L2 classroom. This study, then, is an attempt to examine the use of Arabic language (L1) in Sudanese EFL context, and to contribute into literature of the relevant field. It aims at exploring Sudanese teachers' views on the use of Arabic (L1) in EFL classroom and discovering possible reasons for the use of L1 while learning FL.

1.1 Study questions

- 1-why Arabic language is used in secondary school English classes?
- 2-To what extent is Arabic as (L1) used in secondary school English classes?
- 3-What are the attitudes of teachers towards using Arabic in EFL classes?

II. Literature review

The quantity and functions of L1 use have widely been analyzed. The results of studies focused on the quantity of L1 and L2 use by language teachers' .Duff and Polio (1990) they documented target language use ranging from 10% to 100% in the classes they studied. In contrast, the functions of L1 use seem strikingly similar. Furthermore, they identified eight categories of common L1 use: 1-classroom administrative, 2-vocabulary, 3-grammar instruction, 4-classroom management, 5-empathy/solidarity, 6-practicing English, unknown vocabulary/translation, 7-lack of comprehension, and 8- an interactive effect in which students use of the L1 prompts their instructor to use it. Though they apply different labels, other studies (Macaro, 2001; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002) referred to similar functions.

Studies about how much teachers use L1 in the classroom have generated varied results. Macaro (2001) examined six student teachers in England. He found out a low percentage of L1 use in their teaching, ranging from 0% to 15.2%. The four teachers in the study by Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) found out a low percentage of L1 in their teaching, with a cross-teacher average of 8.8%. Other researchers, however, reported considerable variations among individual teachers in their studies. For example, Duff and Polio (1990) illustrated that a group of 13 teachers, who taught different target languages to English-speaking students in an American university, differed dramatically in their use of English, ranging from 0% to 90%. Lieu et al (2004) investigated 13 Korean teachers of English in high schools. They recorded material from 14 teachers' classes, and found their use of Korean ranged from 10% to 90% of class time. Kim and Elder (2005) examined seven teachers who taught foreign languages in New Zealand. They showed that the proportion of target language used among these teachers varied from 23% to 88%, indicating a high level of variation in the use of student's L1.

The diversity concerning the quantification of teachers' use of L1 may result from the different contexts and different approaches involved in these studies. While it is impossible to generalize, it seems reasonable to conclude that teachers can hardly avoid the use of L1 when they share it with their students, no matter in what contexts they teach.

This study is set to carry out a similar study on the use of the native language in the Sudanese Secondary School context. However, differences exist between these studies and this study. Firstly, in the above studies, English was the official second language of the classroom, while in this study English is a foreign language to the participants. Secondly, the participants in this research are secondary school teachers.

III. The study

Participants

100 English language teachers at secondary level in Khartoum were asked to fill out the questionnaire, and 7 teachers' classes were observed.

Data collection

To answer the study questions, the study used questionnaire and classroom observation.

The questionnaire

The teachers' questionnaire divided into two sections:

Part 1: included 5 statements, surveying teacher use of the L1 (Arabic language) in English classroom, with Likert 5- point scale: (Always, often, sometimes, rarely and never).

Part 11 : included 7 statements , surveying teachers' attitudes towards using the L1 (Arabic language) in English classroom , with Likert 5- point scale : (Strongly agree , agree , not sure , disagree and strongly disagree) .

Classroom Observation

The researcher visited some schools and observed some language classes. What was observed was English lessons from SPINE books .The observation was conducted to see whether Arabic language was used inside the classroom or not, and for what purpose. The Classroom observations, which involved 7 teachers, were conducted by using check-list to note down observations. The check list covered the following items: explaining exercises, grammar, vocabulary, checking understanding, praising, and telling jokes.

IV. Results and discussion

Table 1. Teacher use of the L1 (Arabic language) in English classroom

Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1-I use Arabic language to explain concepts.	7(7%)	8(8%)	63 (63%)	15(15%)	7(7%)
2-I use Arabic language to explain new vocabulary.	6(6%)	18(18%)	43 (43%)	15(15%)	16(16%)
3-I use Arabic language to explain grammar.	7 (7%)	12(12%)	31 (31%)	18(18%)	32(32%)
4-I use Arabic language to control the class.	15(15%)	13(13%)	15(15%)	9(9%)	46(46%)
5-I use Arabic language to give instructions.	7 (7%)	8(8%)	33(33%)	17 (17%)	35(35%)

Regarding the use of Arabic language to explain concepts, the majority of teachers (78%) stated they often utilize Arabic language to explain concepts, while (22)22% of them stated that they rarely used it. This suggests that Arabic language is often used to explain new concepts. There are various aspects of English language that may be totally alien to a certain groups of learners and therefore, an introduction in L2 involving a comparison with L2, can be invaluable for better clarifying what these are and how they work. Further, there are some areas like vocabulary where the mother tongue might actually be quite useful and efficient in explaining words which cannot be explained in the target language, for example some abstract words'. Therefore, using L1 helps in saving time and clarity.

More than two thirds (67%) questioned stated that Arabic was often used to explain new vocabulary, while 31(31%) of them stated they've never used this practice. This clearly shows that Arabic is used to explain vocabulary. Several reasons could explain why teachers rely on Arabic to explain new vocabulary: Instead of going through a long explanation in the target language, it would sometimes be easier and more efficient to give a translation of a vocabulary item or an explanation of a grammar point in Arabic. The analysis of classroom observations proves this result. This finding is an agreement with Duff (1989) as he described: "How translation can help in developing three characteristics essential for language learning: flexibility, accuracy, and clarity". He stated: "Translation trains the learner to search (flexibility) for the most accurate words what is meant (clarity). This combination of freedom and constraint allows the students to contribute their own thoughts to a discussion which has a clear focus-the text". Further, Nation (2003) emphasized and encouraged the use of bilingual cards, L1-L2 word pairs and L1 translation as the best ways for increasing vocabulary size. He contends "Forget all the criticism you have heard about rote learning and translation; research has repeatedly shown that such learning is very effective".

Concerning the use of Arabic to explain grammar, half of the teachers questioned (50%) stated that they sometimes use Arabic to explain grammar. However, half of them (50%) stated they never used it. This clearly indicates the lack of consensus among teachers in usage of Arabic to explain grammar. This could be due to the way of teaching grammar: teachers only focus on teaching form rather than meaning and usages. Teaching form doesn't require more explanation. It can also be said that they didn't offer a way to highlight similarities and differences between L1 and L2 form. In other words, when similarities and differences of both languages are discovered, the target language learning is enhanced. Unlike Arabic, the norm in English Syntax is the subject comes first, followed by the verb predicate. Classroom observations provide essential evidences to this result.

More than half of the teachers questioned (55%) stated that they never used Arabic to maintain class control, 28(28%) stated it was often used, and 15(15%) stated that this practice was always. This clearly suggests that only few teachers use Arabic language to maintain class control. This could be attributed to the fact that the language used for class control is very simple, that not need to be addressed in the first language. Further, teachers' views in the area of classroom management might be due to the teaching context, in which the teachers maximize TL use when managing the class.

Almost half of the teachers questioned (48%) stated they sometimes used Arabic language to give instructions, while 52 (52%) stated they rarely used it. This clearly shows that some teachers utilized Arabic language to give instructions, though their range of use varied considerably. Although it is seemingly true that explaining an activity in the target language is "genuine communication", it can be said that the many communicative interaction activities for early level students are very useful in themselves, but it can be rather complicated to set up. L1 can help in giving and explaining the activity and to make sure that everyone comes to a general understanding. In another debate on the use of L1 in L2 instruction, Lucas and Katz (1994) claimed that "for students with little or no proficiency in English, their native language is the only effective means for providing access to content area development". By discussing content in their native language, students can interact more effectively about more sophisticated content and have greater access to their own knowledge and experience. Furthermore, studies suggested that 'instruction that focuses primarily on meaning but allows for a focus on form within meaningful contexts works best' (Lightbown and Spada 1999). The increased awareness of the facilitative role of formal instruction in meaning-based classroom environments led some teacher-researchers to look at ways in which L1 is used in the classroom, in so far as it may contribute to explicit knowledge of the target language, and be actually beneficial.

Table 2. Teachers' attitudes towards using the L1 (Arabic language) in English classroom

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-Using Arabic language helps learners to understand new concepts.	7 (7%)	47(47%)	13(13%)	25(25%)	8 (8%)
2-Using Arabic language helps learners to understand new vocabulary.	7 (7%)	56 (56%)	4 (4%)	27(27%)	6(6%)
3-Using Arabic language helps learners to understand grammatical points better.	8 (8%)	35(35%)	10(10%)	38(38%)	9(9%)
4-Using Arabic language makes it easier for the teacher to control the class.	7 (7%)	22(22%)	4 (4%)	49(49%)	18(18%)
5- Using Arabic language reduces pupils stress.	8 (8%)	49(49%)	14(14%)	19(19%)	10(10%)
6-Teachers of young learners need to use a lot of Arabic language.	8 (8%)	26(26%)	14(14%)	37(37%)	15(15%)
7-Using Arabic language helps pupils learn different language skills.	6 (6%)	23(23%)	12(12%)	39(39%)	20(20%)

(54) 54 % of the teachers questioned agreed that Arabic helps learners to understand new concepts, (33) 33% stated that they've disagreed, while (13) 13% of those questioned stated that they are not sure. This clearly indicates that the use of Arabic language helps learners to understand new concepts. Sometimes certain concepts are difficult to grasp when they are explained in the target language, so L1 could be a valuable source to explain them. It saves times, clarity and accuracy.

Two thirds (63%) of the teachers questioned agreed that using Arabic language helps learners to understand new vocabulary, (33) 33% stated that they've disagreed, while (4) 4% of those questioned stated that they are not sure This suggests that using Arabic aids learners to understand new vocabulary. Analysis of classroom observations also proves this result. Moreover, concerning the relationship between L1 and L2 with regards to foreign language learning, recent studies have shown that "a learners' L1 is one of the most important factors in learning L2 vocabulary"(Scmitt and McCarthy 1997). The reason behind this is that L1 translations are usually clear, short and familiar, qualities which are very important in effective definitions (McKeown

1993). When the use of an L1 translation is combined with the use of word cards for the initial learning of vocabulary, then learners have a very effective strategy for speeding up vocabulary growth.

(43) 43 % of the teachers agreed that using Arabic language helps learners to understand grammar points better, while (47) 47 % stated they've disagreed, and (10) 10 % stated that they are not sure. This result suggests that there is a lack of agreement among teachers whether the use of Arabic helps pupils to understand grammar better or not. Two possible factors could explain this discrepancy of teacher's attitude: firstly, the L1 can play both positive and negative roles in L2 learning, depending on how similar the two languages are:

"The beginning stages of learning a second language are especially vulnerable to interlingual transfer from the native language, or interference. In these early stages, before the system of the second language is familiar, the native language is the only previous linguistic system upon which the learner can draw" (Brown, 2000: 224).

Related languages have a general advantage in that they share concepts, cognates, and may be structurally similar. This can be extremely advantageous for language learners as they are able to access schema from their L1. Secondly, explaining the meaning of a grammatical item, on the other hand, is an integral part of the language course and as such should ideally be conducted in English. More often, teachers resort to the LI to explain grammar because they feel that the L2 explanation is too complicated, and may even feel themselves incapable of giving a clear and unambiguous explanation of the structure in question exclusively in English (Harbord: 1992).

Concerning the statement: "Using Arabic language makes it easier for the teacher to control the class", the majority (67%) of the teachers questioned disagreed with this statement, while (4) 4 % of the teachers questioned stated they are not sure, while (29) 29 % of those questioned stated that they agreed. This clearly indicates that the use of L1 or Arabic has nothing to do with the ease of maintaining class control. The language of class control is very simple language, like: be quiet, shut up, etc. Classroom observation provides evidence to this result.

With respect to using Arabic language in reducing pupils stress, more than half of those questioned (57%) agreed that using Arabic language contributes towards pupils feeling less stressed, (14)14 % of the teachers questioned stated they are not sure, and only (29) 29 % of those questioned stated they've disagreed. Therefore, we can say that these results reflect that the use of Arabic language play an essential role contributing in reducing stress. When it helps to engender security "starting with the L1 gives a sense of security and validates the learner's lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English." (Auerbach, 1993) Mix in a little of the familiar, and a little L1 in the classroom, and you have a confident learner ready for new challenges.

(34) 34 % of teachers questioned agreed that teachers of young learners need to use a lot of Arabic language, more than half of those questioned(52%) stated that they've disagreed, while (14) 14 % of the teachers questioned stated that they are not sure. This data reveals that there is a need for young learners to be exposed to the target language only: where learners have little opportunity to meet and use the L2 outside the classroom, it is very important that L2 usage is maximized within the classroom. This finding is in contrast with Cole (1998) stating: "L1 is most useful at the beginning and low levels. If students have little or no knowledge of the target language, L1 can be used to introduce the major differences between L1 and L2, and the main grammatical characteristics of L2 that they should be aware of. This gives them a head start and saves a lot of guessing". As Butzamm (2003) puts it: "With growing proficiency in the foreign language, the use of the mother tongue becomes largely redundant and the FL will stand on its own two feet".

(29) 29 % of the teachers questioned agreed that use of Arabic language helps pupils learn different language skills, (59) 59 % stated that they've disagreed, and only (12) 12 % of those questioned stated that they are not sure. This finding indicates that the use of Arabic language doesn't necessarily help pupils in learning different language skills. This finding is contrary to Bonyadi and Owen (2003) when they asserted that there are many other activities to use with translation that successfully raise consciousness of the L2. The following principles support the use of translation for L2 acquisition:

Translation uses authentic materials. Students respond to relevant materials from the real world, and with translation teachers have an opportunity to select the most appropriate types of texts.

Translation is interactive. Translation does not have to be a solitary activity. It can promote communication through classroom discussions with the teacher and among students through group work and peer correction.

Translation is learner-centered. The learner-centered classroom is essential to effective teaching. Motivated students have input into the selection of materials and the design of activities. The teacher allows for questions and feedback as students negotiate the meaning of language.

Translation promotes learner autonomy. Translation can motivate students as they gain an understanding of the intricacies of the L2, including different communication and learning strategies. Bonyadi and Owen also discover their own learning styles and become acquainted with using dictionaries and electronic

resources. All of this instills confidence in their own abilities and, most importantly, provides them with skills they can use outside the classroom. For these reasons and more, translation is now considered an acceptable procedure for the Communicative Approach to language teaching (Bonyadi 2003). Haliday et al., (1964) stated that to adopt translation as a technique in the early stage of language teaching will cause the pupils to face ‘a graded mixture of problems in grammar, lexis and orthography’ and later in the course translation becomes harder to set and mark as well as more difficult to perform. They conclude the section on translation by stating that it is more suitable for the advanced stages.

Analysis of classroom observation

Table 3.A check list, summarizing the purposes and frequency of using L1 in an EFL classroom.

Purpose of using L1	Teacher1	Teacher2	Teacher3	Teacher4	Teacher5	Teacher6	Teacher7	Total
Explaining exercises in the book	1	2	0	2	3	1	3	12
Checking understanding	1	3	3	0	1	2	1	11
Giving instruction	1	0	2	1	2	2	1	9
Explaining meaning of vocabulary	2	6	9	6	8	7	6	43
Explaining rules of grammar	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	5
Organizing classroom settings	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Class management	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussing classroom events	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Praising	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Telling jokes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The above table shows that Arabic was utilized by seven teachers in secondary reading classes to give instructions, explain meaning, explaining grammar and to organize classroom setting. Arabic was used a total of 43 times to explain the meaning of a word.

Teacher 1 used Arabic (2) times to explain words, and the pupils seemed to respond to understanding both easily and quickly. (1) time to explain exercise, checking understanding, giving instruction, and organizing classroom setting. Teacher 2 used Arabic a total of (6) times to explain words, (2) times to explain exercise, and (3) times for checking understanding. Teacher 3 used Arabic a total of (9) times to explain words,(2) times to give instruction, (3) times checking understanding and (1) time to explain grammar rule.

Teacher 4 used Arabic a total of (6) times to explain words,(2) times to explain exercise, (1) time giving instruction and (2) times to explain grammar rules. Teacher 5 used Arabic a total (8) times to explain words, (3) times to explain exercise, (1) time giving instruction and (2) times to explain grammar rules.

Teacher 6 used Arabic a total of (7) times to explain words, (1) time to explain exercise in the book, (2) times for checking understanding and giving instruction. And finally, Teacher 7 used Arabic a total of (6) times to explain words,(3) times to explain exercises, (2) times to explain grammar rules, and (1) time for checking understanding and giving instruction.

These seven class observations indicate that the Arabic language was used on occasion when English explanations fail to work; therefore, the L1 plays a supportive and facilitating role in the classroom. From the above table we can conclude that Arabic was used a total of 81 times by the 7 teachers. Overall, it can be said that, translation was once again the most common purpose for L1 use. In a nutshell, one can confidently assert that Arabic was not only used to explain abstract words but also other words.

V. Conclusion

This study tried to shed light on teachers’ attitude towards the use of L1 in L2 classroom, and discovering possible reasons for the use of L1 while learning FL. The results of this study showed that teachers used Arabic for some purposes: to explain concept, new vocabulary, grammar, to give instruction, to facilitate classroom discussions and checking comprehension. This finding is consistent with Duff & Polio (1990) who identified eight categories of common L1 use: classroom administrative vocabulary, grammar instruction, classroom management, empathy, solidarity, practicing English, unknown vocabulary, translation, lack of comprehension, and an interactive effect on which students’ use of the L1 prompts their instructor to use it. Furthermore, teachers’ use of Arabic within English classes in the questionnaire ranging considerably from 20% “rarely” to 80% “always” to. A similar finding was arrived at by Lieu et al (2004) who found out that 13 Korean teachers use of Korean ranged from 10% to 90% of class time. Further, Teachers showed positive attitude towards the use of L1 in: helping learners to understand new concepts, new vocabulary, and grammatical points better, as well as reducing pupils stress. Almost one third of them supported the use of Arabic in: controlling the class, with young long learners and helping pupils learn different skills respectively. This finding confirmed Qoura study (2005) which showed that the majority of EFL teachers supported the use of the L1 in their classrooms, although the degree of support depended on the level of the learners.

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