

## Unlocking the Potential of Translanguaging: Teachers' perspectives to Maximize Learner Outcomes

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### Abstract

That First Language (L1) facilitates Foreign Language Learning is a debatable issue in the field of language pedagogy. This field has evidence for and against using L1 in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, showing positive and negative learning outcomes. Behind this controversy, the current study investigates teachers' attitudes regarding using L1 in EFL classrooms in Saudi contexts and whether or not language teachers think it aids or improves students' performance. The study sought to provide teachers of EFL with a perspective on monolingual and Translanguaging approaches. Thus, it investigated how English language instructors at Saudi universities view the role of Arabic in English language learning/teaching. The data were collected through questionnaires, class observation, and interviews. The participants were 104 teachers of English from different Saudi Universities with varied ethnic backgrounds, and subsequently, three participants were chosen to observe their classes twice and, afterward, follow-up semi-structured interviews. The data from the questionnaire was submitted to SPSS for data analysis, and the data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed manually with the assistance of computational devices. A classroom observation checklist was used to triangulate the findings of the questionnaire. This study indicated that teachers believe frequent English exposure is the best way to teach it. In addition, the study suggests that the L1 is useful for explicit learning and reduces anxiety, thereby assisting students in adjusting to the Foreign Language environment.

*Keywords:* Bilingualism, English as a Foreign Language, English Language Learning, First Language, monolingual approach, teachers' perceptions, translanguaging pedagogies

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## Introduction

In recent years, the increasing demand for English Language Learning (ELL) classrooms has transformed into a booming industry globally. Therefore, more time and money were allocated to the ELL classroom. Sugarman (2016) stated, "English learners (ELs) are one of the populations to whom financial support has been targeted through supplementary funding" (p. 3). Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the fact that the way English classrooms are managed is still insufficient. Thus, educators prioritized resources for interventions to help English Language students (ELs) recover gaps in learning opportunities. Therefore, the ELL classrooms regained widespread attention as they purport to improve the student's overall experience.

ELs need to be provided with extensive English input that is authentic and similar to the mode of communication in English-speaking countries. Krashen's input hypothesis  $i+1$ , which is slightly more challenging to the ELs, can be an excellent way to help students learn the language and improve their levels significantly in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Krashen, 1981). The value of the input in EFL cannot be overstated since it aids in improving different skills, such as reading and listening (Dekeyser, 1997). Krashen (1982) believed that the only way to learn a language is through comprehensible input. Dekeyser (1997), on the other hand, stated that input could not be used to automate production skills. As a result, exploring input functions in ELL is critical to developing effective EFL teaching strategies.

Scholars such as Turnbull (2001) argued that instructors should encourage students to use their EFL more in the classroom, as it is the only setting in which they have the opportunity to do so. Therefore, it can serve as a means of motivating and challenging language learners. Additionally, it is believed that the best way for ELs to develop and improve their English skills is to eliminate their native language. According to Al-Zoubi (2018), the most effective method to learn English is for students to expose themselves to it more. According to this perspective, the use of English necessitates prohibiting or encouraging learners to abandon their native tongue. On the other hand, the Ontario Ministry of Education recommended an entirely different strategy. They published a booklet called *Many Roots, Many Voices* (2005) to help ELs in public schools. It supported the notion of welcoming First Language (L1) into the classroom while teaching various subjects. Through the strategic use of the students' L1, they would feel at ease and supported in the environment, especially for the beginning and pre-intermediate levels, where it is hard for students to communicate with the target language.

Educators must ensure that they are aware of the two teaching approaches and be able to determine the weaknesses and strengths of each of them to decide which is going to help their students the best. Particularly, the translanguaging approach actively employs students' L1 in English language teaching, whereas the monolingual approach reduces students' L1 in the English language classroom (Du, 2016; Tang, 2002).

## Statement of Problem

Not all schools encourage students to use their native language during their ELL. For example, students must speak English in the majority of English classes at Saudi universities.

Because English input is critical, the majority of instructors support this strategy. Despite this rule, some teachers allow students to discuss assignments in their native languages. This means some teachers advocate monolingual language instruction, while others promote translanguaging language instruction. The debate on language instruction among Saudi teachers is ongoing. Clear communication of teaching techniques would be an excellent way to learn how different teaching approaches function properly, why English teachers make certain decisions, and how these decisions affect classrooms.

Because theories do not work in every classroom, teachers should reflect and learn from one another. Therefore, the perspectives of English language teachers should be investigated. Hearing different approaches to teaching English provides teachers with comprehensive advice. As a result, researching English teaching methods can help all teachers improve their instruction, assist English language learners, and reflect on their practices. In addition, it provides feedback on the implementation and outcomes of new concepts in English language education. As a result, this study looks into the best approach and the factors that influence it.

### ***Significance of the study***

English has become the most frequently spoken language in the world, yet many English speakers do not speak it as their native language (Graddol & Meinhof, 1999). This is mainly due to the growing trend of globalization, which is resulting in increased international trade and travel, as well as the advancements in communication technology that allow a far greater population to speak English. For example, although English is not an official language in Saudi Arabia, the 2030 vision has made it valuable, and the Saudi government created more ELL opportunities for its citizens to be competitive in the global economy.

An examination of EFL instructors' practices may serve several purposes in the context of teaching English in Saudi Arabia. Aside from the demands of the English teaching profession and the enrichment of professional development, teachers can better serve their students by investigating the strategies employed by other instructors. It also allows instructors to reflect on and learn from their own and others' EFL teaching experiences. Depending on the demands of the classroom, these ideas can be categorized and used as recommendations for instructors. It is critical that instructors study various methodologies and determine what they can take away to help their students learn English more efficiently.

### ***Research Objectives***

Exploring teachers' perspectives can help researchers determine how instructors understand the usage of students' L1 in EFL classrooms and how they integrate theories and experiences into the teaching. Teachers' perspectives are essential aspects of the reflection and development of teaching strategies and teaching philosophies. Therefore, to understand the strategies adopted in their classes, it is necessary to know the teachers' perspectives on the approaches they employ.

### ***Research Question***

This research aims at answering the following research question:  
From the perspective of EFL teachers at Saudi universities, what role does L1 play in EFL classrooms?

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Monolingual Pedagogies***

“What is essential is that the language being studied should be as far as possible the sole medium of communication in any given environment” (Gatenby, 1965, p. 48). Gatenby argued that the student’s L1 should be avoided at all costs in any form of communication and any environment and only use English to learn it. Lado (1957) discussed the possibilities of transferring errors and mistakes when using the L1 while learning the EFL due to the interference that might occur. He suggested prohibiting the use of L1 in the language classroom to reduce or eliminate interference. Furthermore, Krashen (1981) underscored that employing the L1 in English language acquisition may be beneficial, but the interference is harmful. Thus, he favored the monolingual method and recommended that students learn English monolingually by giving them comprehensible input. In addition, Schmidt’s (1990) noticing hypothesis supported the monolingual approach as learners benefit more from consciously noticing forms of input. ELs need to notice EFL instructors as rich input that would lead to more attention to the target language resulting in richer intake (Leow, 2007; Schmidt, 1990).

Thus, the monolingual approach reduces interference between the L1 and EFL, which means the negative impact of the L1 on the ELL will be maintained to a minimum scale. Furthermore, using English as the only means of communication could result in a more natural acquisition environment. This natural learning environment with continual comprehensible input is linked with increased language competency (Dekeyser, 1997; Leow, 2007). Moreover, the monolingual approach has advantages for teachers as they do not have to decide when to use students’ L1 during classes and when it should be taken out. In addition, using English only can bridge the communication between teachers and students, albeit it must be comprehensible. Given these advantages, it is easy to see why many ESL teachers go for a monolingual approach in the classroom. However, with the findings of some studies (e.g. Allard et al., 2023; Lee and Macaro, 2013; Schoeman et al., 2023), this assumption began to be questioned, as it was discovered that learners do not value the monolingual approach and that the monolingual approach may not be superior to its bilingual counterpart, at least in terms of some aspects of target language acquisition.

#### ***Translanguaging Pedagogies***

The Translanguaging approach regards the L1 as a beneficial tool that should be intentionally exploited in EFL classes rather than considering it a hindrance. According to Schoeman et al. (2023), “Translanguaging and functional multilingualism had the goal of using multiple languages to develop proficiency in the target languages” (p. 2). Thus, the L1 plays a

significant, if not primary, role in acquiring the EFL. This implies that input and instruction in the EFL will still be provided, but the usage of the L1 will not be limited as in the monolingual approach. Instead, the L1 should be used, promoted, and actively employed in language classrooms (Cook, 2001). Schoeman et al. (2023) explained that “translanguaging contributed to familial cariño, creating classrooms in which students felt comfortable and had a positive rapport with teachers and each other” (p. 12).

Ellis (1994) suggested that the L1 has a positive role in the classroom. Ma (2013) agreed with the idea that the L1 enhances learners' L2 acquisition as he said, “while they are putting overdue emphasis on negative transfer, they are ignoring the function of positive transfer that can accelerate L2 language learning” (p. 33). Moreover, Cook (2001) asserted that separating the L1 and L2 is a way to failure that should be avoided as they are interwoven in the students' minds. He claimed that EFL acquisition is not a separate process and that the L1 and EFL go through stages of integration rather than separation in language learning. Therefore, the role of the L1 in ELL is just as significant as the English language because the L1 becomes increasingly related to the ELL tool. Rafi (2023) also stated that “students engaged in translanguaging could produce more succinct, well-formed essays and score higher than those who were forced to write monolingually” (p. 40).

Language is not merely an object, it is a sophisticated system, and therefore, the role of the L1 cannot be easily identified (Chomsky, 1957). Depending on the component of the target language, the L1 may have a different role. According to Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001), “the L1 [was used] by L2 readers to help them wrestle with word and sentence level problems, confirm comprehension, predict text structure and content” (p. 491). Moreover, Halasa and Al-Manaseer (2012) identified the role of the L1 in task completion activities to take the role of instructional tools. Thus, in ELL, the L1 serves as a scaffold (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). Moreover, Rafi (2023) realized that translanguaging approaches played an essential role in fostering the learning process of the ELs and “enabled them to develop a more robust understanding of the content; hence, they took less time writing the final product than regular classrooms” (p. 40).

Studies proved that the natures of language classrooms require a combination of different languages in linguistic production (Jorgensen, 2008; Lambert, 1990). For example, Els tend to mix their L1 rules with the EFL whenever they try to speak in English. They also involve code-switching more frequently between L1 to L2 to express themselves adequately. Additionally, studies suggested that some structures and features of languages are the same in L1 and EFL. Therefore, allowing students to transfer their knowledge will positively help facilitate EFL learning (Ellis & Fotos, 1999; Ma, 2013). Rafi and Morgan (2021) explored the use of bilingual pedagogies in an academic writing skill development course at a public institution in Bangladesh. The outcomes of this study challenged monolingual approaches to academic writing and changed typical exercises that were limited to the target language only. In addition, the intentional use of bilingual pedagogies and content suited to students' native language(s) and experiences helped promote cross-linguistic analysis, building metalinguistic awareness, and fostering a deeper grasp

of persuasive language traditions across cultures. Cenoz & Gorter (2020) proposed that L2 learners may benefit from their multilingualism if planned teaching techniques are used to increase language and metalinguistic awareness.

Behan et al. (1997) argued that allowing students to use their L1 in the classroom helped them to achieve higher scores than if they only used the target language. In addition, Swain and Lapkins (2000) supported the idea of using the L1 in the classroom as they proved that students who used their L1 in preparing their writing tasks were able to finish their assignments faster than students who were not allowed to use their mother tongue. Liu and Zeng (2015) suggested that using the L1 for learners at the beginning level can help them better understand the contents and express themselves more precisely.

Individual classrooms must be explored based on the observations above because what instructors do in class eventually affects the results of ELL at the board or even program level. However, the studies did not look into the teachers' perspectives as thoroughly as they did with the students. As a result, the current study focuses on the teachers' viewpoints and allows them to communicate about their techniques and what is behind their perceptions. This helps to improve research information on teachers' perspectives while also providing a clearer picture of additional techniques employed by instructors and the reasons behind their selections.

## Method

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to determine teachers' perceptions of the significance of students' L1 in the EFL classroom and how these perceptions influenced their teaching practices. It employs Tang's (2002) methodology, which consisted of a survey questionnaire requesting a "holistic" perspective and a follow-up interview in which participants were questioned about their methods and approaches. Interviews are helpful for this research because they permit participants to speak freely and request additional information. In addition, prior to the interview, classroom observations were utilized as a qualitative step to collect additional data. Combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies helps compensate for each method's shortcomings.

## Participants

During the academic year 2022, 104 faculty members from Saudi universities (including, but not limited to, Jazan University, King Khaled University, Taybah University, and Tabuk University) with teaching experience ranging from one to fifteen years volunteered to participate in the survey. Six percent of the participants were teaching English for one to three years, 13% were teaching for four to six years, 13% were teaching for seven to nine years, 32% were teaching for 10-15 years, and 38% were teaching for over 15 years. Regarding the L1 of the teachers, 42% of them were Arabic speakers, 4% of English as their mother tongue, and 54% were speakers of languages other than Arabic and English. Among the participants, 43% of them were females, and

57% of them were males. In addition, three teachers were randomly selected for classroom observations and interviews.

### ***Research Instruments***

To determine how teachers' perceptions of the significance of students' L1 in the ELL classroom influenced their pedagogical approaches, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used.

#### ***Questionnaires***

To find out EFL teachers' perspectives on using Arabic in the classroom, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree', was filled out on Microsoft forms (see Appendix A). The questionnaire consisted of 15 items assessing participants' behaviors and attitudes toward teachers using L1 in their EFL classrooms, as well as three demographic questions.

#### ***Classroom Observations***

Some six randomly selected first-year English language classes (each lasting about 50 minutes) by three teachers were observed to determine how often and in what situations Arabic was used (see Appendix B for the teachers' profile). Teachers and students were not aware of the goal of the observation beforehand to get more authentic classroom data.

#### ***Interviews***

The three teachers whose classes were observed participated in semi-structured interviews in which they were asked why they sometimes preferred to use Arabic rather than English in their classrooms (see Appendix C for the interview questions). The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

### ***Research Procedures***

This is a mixed methods study consisting of quantitative and qualitative methods. The first part was the questionnaire. A link to the questionnaire was distributed via university WhatsApp groups, Twitter, and Facebook. Also, friends and colleagues were invited to share it with the WhatsApp groups at their universities. For the second part of the study, six classroom observations and three semi-instructed follow-up interviews were conducted to collect further information. Each interview lasted an hour and was audiotaped on at least two devices. Transcribing this interview followed.

In addition, following the collection of data, an analysis of the results was conducted. SPSS was used to analyze questionnaire results, while Microsoft Office Excel 2010 was used to analyze results from observations and interviews. The practical process depended on the validity, veracity, and ethical standards of academic research, with participants' consent and anonymity.

## Results

### *Questionnaires Analysis*

#### *Preliminary Interpretation*

After receiving the survey data, an excel file was created. After that, the data were uploaded to SPSS statistical software to analyze the items, to determine descriptive statistics for each item, including mean and standard deviation administrations (see Appendix E), and to ensure that all items evidenced sufficient variance. Item analysis revealed that all items had sufficient variance.

The descriptive statistics give the means and standard deviations for each questionnaire item. Visual inspection of items means suggested a divide between teachers' perceptions of the idea of using Arabic in the English language classes, with scores suggesting that five was higher than one, where five indicated that the respondents strongly agreed with the giving statement. In contrast, one revealed that the respondents strongly disagreed with the statements.

The data were then examined to determine whether they were suitable for factor analysis. An examination of the correlation matrix showed that each variable was correlated at three, with at least one more variable not getting into the fray. Hence it might be removed. The correlation  $r$  has to be .30 or greater, as anything lower would suggest a weak relationship between variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Furthermore, none of the variables correlated above .90, which suggests that while there were relationships among variables, they did not overlap to the extent of multicollinearity (which would suggest that some items did not add unique information to the data).

In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was at the level of  $<.001$  (see Table 2), meaning that the data are a good match for factor analysis and have patterned relationships. Finally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) of Sampling Adequacy was examined, and it determined that the data is suitable for the EFA with a cut-off above .50, which was .806. This indicates that the degree of information among the variables presents a strong partial correlation (See Table one).

Table 1. SPSS output for KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.806
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	458.344
	Df	105
	Sig.	$<.001$

#### *Factor Extraction and Rotation*

The factor analysis was set to extract any factor with an eigenvalue over one. This yielded four underlying factors. Factor one explains 29.69%, Factor two explains 14.39%, Factor three explains 8.03%, and Factor four explains 6.77% (see Table two).



Table 2. *Truncated SPSS output for the total variance explained for extracted factors*

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.453	29.686	29.686	4.453	29.686	29.686
2	2.158	14.387	44.074	2.158	14.387	44.074
3	1.204	8.024	52.097	1.204	8.024	52.097
4	1.016	6.771	58.869	1.016	6.771	58.869

The rotated component matrix displayed the loading of questionnaire items onto the four factors (see Appendix F). Again, this was nearly a clean solution, with most items loading onto only one factor.

The data has four factors: (a) L1 to help comprehend with ease while teaching the EFL, (b) Mother tongue L1 not to be used strictly, (c) English to improve, and (d) English preferred to communicate in classes.

#### *Item Analysis and Cronbach's Alpha*

One way to test internal consistency or the relatedness of multiple questions in a group was to measure Cronbach's alpha. Thus, SPSS was used to conduct Cronbach's alpha analysis to test the consistency of the items within the four factors extracted earlier in the paper through the stage of factor analysis. (a) L1 to help comprehend with ease while teaching the EFL, (b) Mother tongue L1 not to be used strictly, (c) English to improve, and (d) English preferred to communicate in classes.

Factor one consisted of eight items that were highly consistent with each other. In this case,  $\alpha = .83$ , which showed that the factor was reliable. The means and standard deviations showed us that the items were tapping into the same concept with similar scores. Moreover, the Inter-Item Correlations table, which displayed how each item correlated to all the other items, showed us that all items measured the same concept and correlated well together. They were all above  $r = 0.3$ .

The second factor consisted of five items that were reliable with each other with  $\alpha = .74$ . The means and standard deviations clarify that the items were tapping into the same concept as well. The Inter-Item Correlations table also proved that all items measured the same concept and correlated well with  $r > 0.3$ . Factors three and four consisted of only one item for each; thus, they were unsuitable for the reliability test.

#### *Descriptive Analysis of the four factors in relation to participants' responses*

The purpose of this analysis was to show the levels of participants' agreement with the four factors. The table below illustrates the degree of certainty with each item within the four factors (see Figure one)

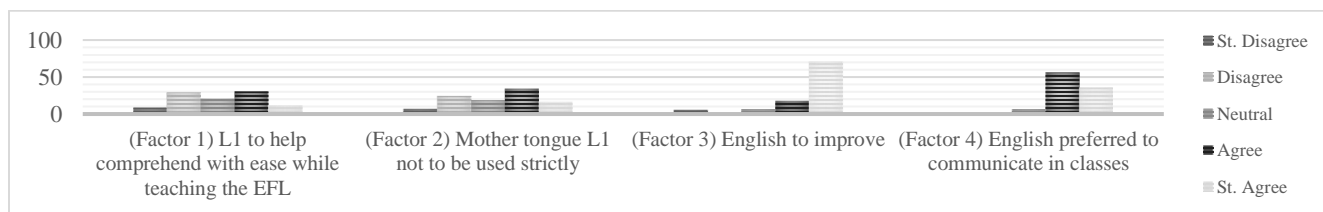


Figure 1. Descriptive analysis of the four factors

As presented in table three, the participants showed great agreement with each of the factors. To give a greater understanding, the items within each factor were analyzed separately. Table four below illustrates the degree of certainty of participants' opinions regarding the L1 to help them comprehend with ease while teaching the EFL (see Figure two).

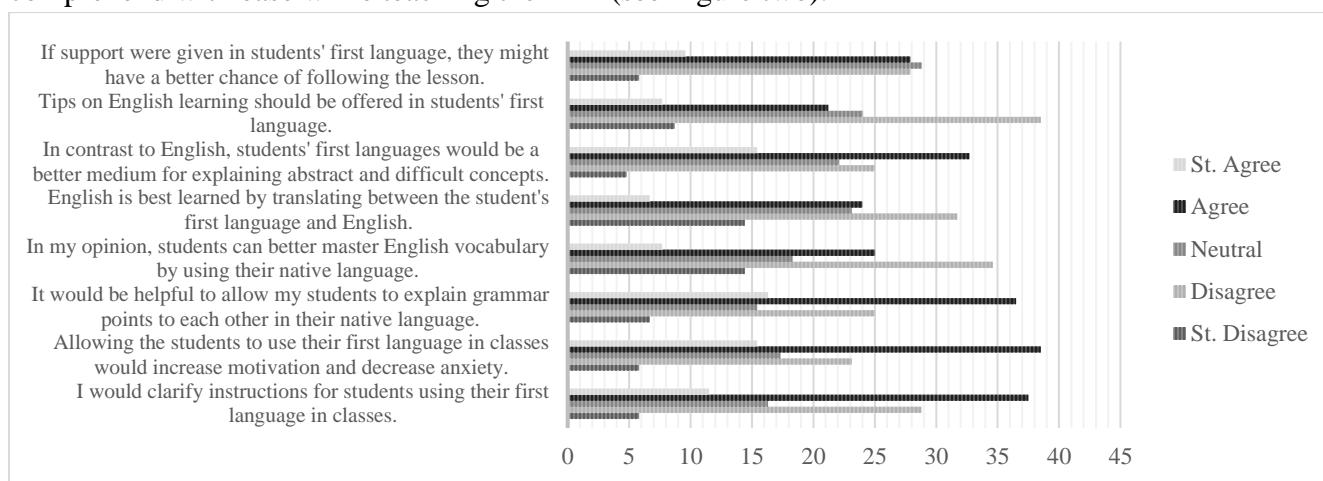


Figure 2. Descriptive Analysis of the first factor

Interestingly, 38.5 % of participants believed allowing students to use their L1 in classes increases motivation and decreases anxiety. However, 34.6% of participants disagreed with the idea that students can better master English vocabulary by using their native language. On the other hand, 38.5% of participants did not agree with the idea that tips on English learning should be offered in students' L1.

Interesting data results were presented when it came to the idea of the medium of the classroom's instruction. 32.7% agreed, and 15.4% strongly agreed that students' L1s would be a better medium for explaining abstract and difficult concepts. 37.5% agreed with the statement that they clarify instruction for students in their L1. 36.5% agreed that allowing students to explain grammar and instruction in their L1.

Amazingly, 28.8% of participants neither agree nor disagree with the support in students' L1 use to have a better chance to follow the lesson. 27.9% disagreed and 27.9% agreed with the same idea. The table below illustrates the degree of certainty of participants' opinions regarding the L1 not being used strictly (see Figure three).

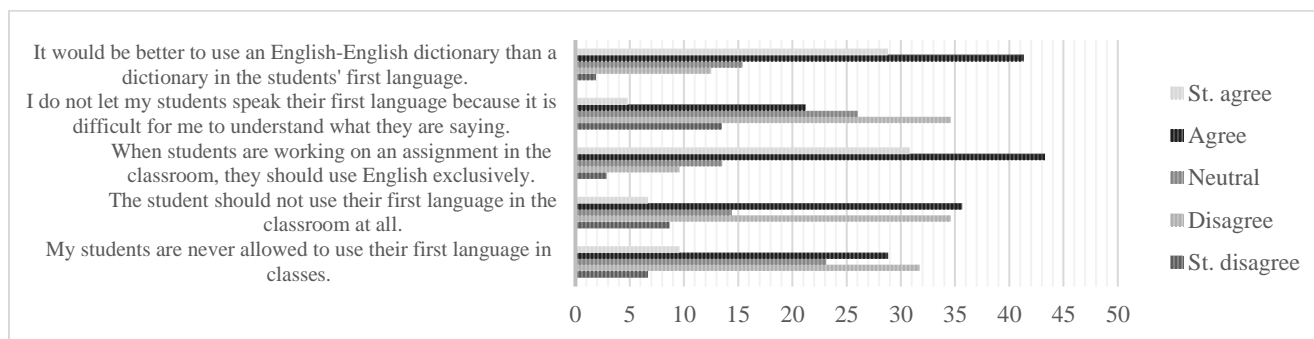


Figure 3. Descriptive Analysis of the second factor

As shown in the table above, there was a debate about not allowing students to use their L1 in the classroom. It is seen that 34.6% disagreed, and 35.6% agreed that their students should not use their L1 in the classroom.

43.3% of the participants thought students should use English exclusively upon working on assignments in the classroom. In addition, 41.3% agreed that using an English-English dictionary is more helpful for language learners than a dictionary in students' L1. Table four shows that 31.7% of participants disagreed with the idea of not allowing students to use their L1 in the classroom.

The table below illustrates the degree of certainty of participants' opinions regarding the English to improve (see Figure four).

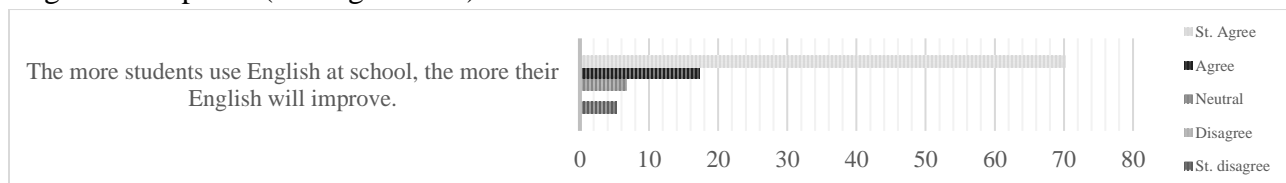


Figure 4. Descriptive Analysis of the third factor

Table six shows that 70% of the participants believed that the more English is used in the classroom, the more their English will improve.

The table below illustrates the degree of certainty of participants' opinions regarding the English preferred to communicate in classes (see Figure five).

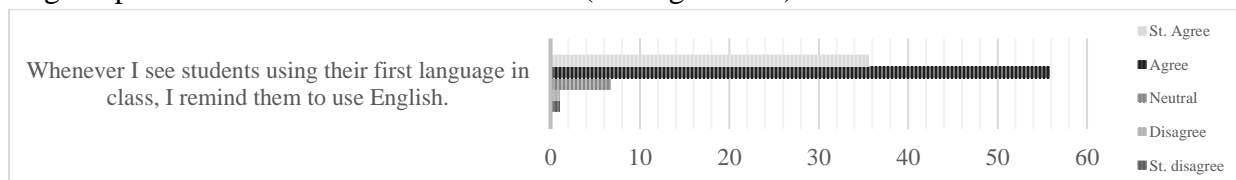


Figure 5. Descriptive Analysis of the fourth factor

91.4% (55.8% Agree & 35.6% St. Agree) of participants remind their students to use English only in the classroom.

**Classroom Observations**

Table three illustrates how many times and in what circumstances students' L1 was used during the observed three classes.

Table 3. *The Number of times students' L1 was used*

Times students' L1 was used.				
	Explaining complex grammar rules	Explaining complex ideas	Explaining the significance of words	Giving instructions
Dr. A	7	6	7	12
Dr. L	10	8	13	8
Dr. M	8	6	9	7

In the first-year level English lessons, three professors employed students' L1 to transfer the technical know-how of English words, their lexical patterns, behavior and the context in which it is used, as shown in the table. The most common usage of students' L1 was to clarify the significance of words, which occurred 29 times. After his English explanations, Dr. M used Arabic to describe some phrases, which proved successful based on the students' reactions. Following her English explanations, Dr. L utilized Arabic to explain the meanings of unknown words. She produced a suitable and culturally unique Arabic equivalent for the term 'feel' in the phrase 'feel under the weather,' and the students got it fast. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the professors solely use Arabic to clarify abstract or culturally specific terms. All three professors initially attempted to explain complicated topics in English and switched to Arabic when they believed the students could not grasp their English explanations.

Dr. A was the one who gave the most instructions in the students' L1. He utilized Arabic only after delivering directions in English in the first five occurrences to guarantee that every student understood what was stated. The professor had to utilize Arabic instructions alone four times to keep the students' attention and get them to follow him. These three classroom observations show that Arabic is utilized when English explanations fail.

**Interviews**

Three teachers were interviewed about their use of students' L1 in the classroom and how they felt about the widespread argument that using students' L1 lowers their exposure to English. One of the interviewees (Dr. A) has been teaching English since 2007, the second interviewee (Dr. L) has been teaching English for three years, and the third interviewee (Dr. M) has been teaching it for six years.

Dr. A found using students' L1 to be realistic and sometimes practical, especially when making the ideal accessible to learners. When asked about the L1 policy in his organization and how he perceives it, he responded, "We were told not to allow Arabic in our classes. Yet, it is

something nonavoidable.” However, Dr. A. was not satisfied with that policy and described it as “not practical and needs to be revisited” and perceived his speech as mentioning that recent research supports the argument of using learners’ native language in EFL classroom contexts.”

Dr. L realized that using L1 depends on the students' levels. She illustrated, “Beginners, for instance, I have not seen any improvement in their communication when I PREVENT using L1 during some complex activities.” However, dr. L found it necessary to use students' L1 upon introducing any complicated or higher-cognitive activity, as she realized that explaining how they do the activity in L1 helps students perform better and improves students’ independence and self-management of learning processes.

On the other hand, Dr. M passionately believes that he must avoid using the L1 in his class unless he finds students did not get what he meant explicitly because he thinks L1 usage ruined exposure to English. Dr. M thinks using English in EFL settings must be dominant, whether by the teachers’ or students’ interaction. Dr. M argued that an EFL teacher for Saudi students must urge using the target language, English, except in cases of misunderstanding, where using the L1 is fruitful to convey the message.

Dr. L and Dr. M were unsure about the language policy in their organizations, as there were no clear policies for using the L1 in classes. In addition, their organizations have never reminded or urged EFL teachers to strictly follow any policies for using the L1. However, both dissuaded their students from using their L1 as they wanted them to learn English through English for better and easier understanding.

Regarding the relation between students' L1 and EFL and whether they think students with good L1 skills might also have good EFL skills, Dr. A argued that it is a mistake to separate the two languages. He explained that successful teachers should be aware of the possible functionality of the two languages to perform the tasks. He insisted that learners with good skills in their L1 will adequately make the positive transfer when needed in their EFL learning. On the other hand, if learners do not have good skills in their mother tongue, they will not have good skills to transfer to the new language, which might reduce the cognitive development and the learning process in each language.

In addition, Dr. M explicated the relationship between students' L1 and EFL. He shed light on how a deficiency of life skills would result in a lack of experience in general; likewise, students must know the target task in their L1 and then redo it interactionally in the target language. He connected that to the example of students’ writing. He insisted, “Undeniably, I think good L1 skills will also have good EFL skills.”

On the other hand, Dr. L elucidated that L2 learners always link their mother tongue and EFL; thus, avoiding using students’ L1 during class time is impossible because students keep connecting L1 and L2 to learn, which helps them accelerate learning. However, Dr. L disagreed with that idea and articulated that one of her friends struggled to understand the EFL despite having good L1 skills. She explained that after one year of learning, her friend could not acquire L2, and her professional skills in L1 did not reflect her ability to acquire L2.

Dr. L was positively sure that by allowing herself and her students to use their L1 in the classroom, her students' comprehension and L2 learning would improve. Moreover, Dr. M strongly believed that some students would have the experience of using English but with much more influence depending on their L1. To elaborate, the students will rely on understanding English as their L1 because of the influence of Arabic as the most dominant and most used language in student's daily life.

Dr. A and Dr. L agreed that using students' L1 saved their class time and motivated their students to be more involved in the language learning process. However, Dr. M disagreed with them and thought that using students' L1 would not have positive consequences in terms of learning because they rely on receiving the target language through their L1. Dr. A persisted that students are more willing to participate and be actively involved in the classroom sessions upon allowing their L1 during classes. He insisted, "Classrooms are more motivating, relaxing and most importantly more supportive and encouraging for the learners." Dr. M was more into students' sides this time and thought that students' emotions in the classroom are particularly important, as suggested by using their L1 along with emphasizing English. He thought a mixed L1 and EFL would motivate students to feel less nervous while speaking or talking in English. On the other hand, Dr. L proposed permitting students to use their L1 to make them more active.

## Discussion

This study explores the perspectives of EFL teachers to answer the research question, "From the perspective of EFL teachers at Saudi universities, what role does L1 play in EFL classrooms?" The data revealed that EFL instructors at Saudi universities deemed it necessary to gradually increase comprehensible input, as students' L1 would no longer be required in the classroom after receiving sufficient information to equip them with an acceptable level of EFL for effective communication. Consequently, 53.9% of participants believed L1 could be used as a scaffold to help ELs manage their anxiety, boost their self-confidence, and interact freely without fear of insufficient comprehension (53.9%).

According to the data analysis, translating key phrases, complex concepts, or even entire sections is an effective way to learn EFL (52.8% of participants agreed that it would be helpful to allow students to explain grammar points to each other in their native language). Furthermore, EFL teachers thought that embracing the usage of students' L1 in group discussions and peer interactions lessened students' nervousness during the classes, and that was connected to Community Language Learning which is a technique that minimizes students' fear and anxiety by actively using their L1 during classrooms' discussions (Cook, 2001). In addition, based on the six classrooms' observations, it was noticed that without translation, students are more likely to produce unguided and frequently erroneous translations. Allard et al. (2023) explained that "translated materials and an open language policy help to prioritize students' content learning and position students for maximum comprehension and engagement of culturally relevant and justice-oriented content" (p. 8)

The interview data showed that teachers of EFL regarded Translanguaging in the classroom to be a positive method. They viewed it as a means of fostering an open, welcoming atmosphere in which all students, regardless of their linguistic background, could express and develop their language abilities. EFL instructors illustrated that allowing students to transition between languages and their L1 was beneficial to comprehending instructions and target language concepts. In addition, the data from the questionnaires showed 49 % of EFL teachers agreed and 16.3% neither agreed nor disagreed that they would clarify instructions for students using their first language. The classroom observations were great support for this as it was clear in the way teachers used students' L1 to explain complex grammar rules, ideas, and word significance and give instructions.

Translanguaging is also viewed as a means to boost student involvement by EFL teachers since it allows for more tailored education and creates natural student discussion and debate. Allard et al. (2023) contended that students' L1 can be used to scold, control, or demean as it is to praise, soothe, or lift up. Translanguaging was regarded by EFL teachers as a tool to increase creative thought and develop critical analysis, problem-solving, and creativity, all of which are highly appreciated in EFL learning situations (Rafi, 2023; Allard et al., 2023; Schoeman et al., 2023).

The research indicates that EFL teachers in Saudi universities believed that using Arabic in ELL/teaching sparingly and wisely in the English classroom does not reduce students' exposure to English but can assist the teaching and learning processes. This is not to exaggerate the role of the L1 or to advocate for greater use of the L1 in EFL classrooms, but rather to clarify some misconceptions that have plagued foreign language teachers for years, such as whether they should use the mother tongue when necessary and whether the frequently cited principle of no native language in the classroom is justified.

Teachers of EFL concurred that students' L1 is used primarily to encourage and assist EFL learning. Consequently, EFL teachers believed that if a certain amount of input is delivered and a certain level of English is attained, students are encouraged to use English whenever appropriate. Explicitly encouraging students to use English when observed speaking in their L1 was also compatible with the Input Hypothesis since the teachers' goal was for students to use English in class (38.4% agreed 23.1% neither agreed nor disagreed that students are never allowed to use their first language in classes). EFL teachers insisted that English remains the dominant language of communication in the classroom, and (91.4 %) of them reminded their students to use English whenever they found them using their L1 during classes. EFL teachers thought that employing the mother tongue, like any other classroom strategy, is merely a technique to improve foreign language proficiency. In addition, 87.5% of the participants agreed that the more the use of English in the classroom, the more significant the improvement of students' English.

The participants acknowledged that translanguaging is difficult to manage and leads to confusion in the classroom if it is not restricted. Moreover, they asserted that when students are permitted to switch between languages too frequently or too freely, they may get distracted or confused and lack the ambition to master the target language. Dr. M was concerned that permitting

students to depend excessively on their native language might hinder their progress in the target language. In addition, the findings have shown that teachers thought enabling Translanguaging might result in the development of poor habits and reduce both fluency and accuracy in the target language.

The debate over Translanguaging within EFL continues as teachers and researchers wrestle with the implications for both students and teachers. Ultimately, it is up to the individual teachers to decide how to best manage and implement Translanguaging activities in their classrooms to promote successful language learning.

### Conclusion

This research investigated and analyzed the use of L1 in classrooms in Saudi universities to provide EFL teachers with a perspective on monolingual and Translanguaging techniques. The study's findings highlighted the possibility of Translanguaging pedagogical approaches to establish opportunities in EFL classrooms that accept all students regardless of their L1 or English proficiency levels. EFL teachers suggested that Translanguaging pedagogies offered a voice to students who were silenced in the typical EFL classroom without interrupting the natural interaction flow of high-achieving students. The study proved that EFL teachers found L1 provides a bridge for teachers and students, bridging gaps in understanding, and providing a safe and supportive learning environment. It was proved that EFL teachers regarded L1 as a scaffold of instruction, facilitating explanations and giving examples, helping with practice and review, aiding comprehension, and encouraging critical thinking and communication. It was proven that the EFL teachers regarded L1 as a tool to explain cultural and linguistic contexts, describe classroom rules and expectations, discuss, and review material, and explain complex concepts. However, EFL instructors thought that if a given amount of knowledge is delivered and a particular level of English is acquired, students should be encouraged to employ English-only roles.

### About the author:

**Dr. Ruqayyah Moafa** is an Assistant Professor at the English Language Institute at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. She possesses a Ph.D. degree in Applied Linguistics. She has conducted substantial research in cross-cultural communication, writing in other languages, discourse analysis, and English Language Teaching. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2657-2053>



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**Appendices**  
**Appendix A**  
**Questionnaire**

Teachers' Perception of Students' Usage of the First Language in The Classroom

Your responses will only take about 5 - 10 minutes and the results will be used as part of research on English language teaching. This survey is VOLUNTARY and CONFIDENTIAL.

Check the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the following number scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

	1	2	3	4	5
The more students use English at school, the more their English will improve.					
My students are never allowed to use their first language in class.					
The student should not use their first language in the classroom at all.					
I would clarify instructions for students using their first language in classes.					
Allowing the students to use their first language in class would increase motivation and decrease anxiety.					
It would be helpful to allow my students to explain grammar points to each other in their native language.					
When students are working on an assignment in the classroom, they should use English exclusively.					
I do not let my students speak their first language because it is difficult for me to understand what they are saying.					
In my opinion, students can better master English vocabulary by using their native language.					
It would be better to use an English-English dictionary than a dictionary in students' first language.					
English is best learned by translating between the students' first language and English.					
In contrast to English, students' first languages would be a better medium for explaining abstract and difficult concepts.					
Tips on English learning should be offered in students' first language.					
Whenever I see students using their first language in class, I remind them to use English.					
If support were given in students' first language, they might have a better chance of following the lesson.					

How long have you been teaching English?

1. 1 – 3 years
2. 4 – 6 years
3. 7 – 9 years
4. 10 – 15 years
5. More than 15 years

What is your first language?

1. Arabic
2. English
3. Others

What is your gender?

1. Male
2. Female

### **Appendix B** **Teachers' profile**

**Dr. A** is an assistant professor who has been teaching English for over ten years. He has been teaching English to the university level students since 2007. He received his MA and Phd. degrees from American universities with major in Applied Linguistics

**Dr. M** is a lecturer who received his MA in TESOL from an American university. He has been teaching English to university level students for six years.

**Dr. L** is a language instructor Who received her MA in TESOL from American university. She has been teaching English for first-year university-level students for over three years.

### **Appendix C** **Interview Question**

1. How long have you been teaching English?
2. What do you think about your students using their first language in the classroom?
3. Is there any time when your students use their first language in class because it is necessary and helps the educational process?
4. Do you have any first language policy in your organization? How do you perceive this policy?
5. From your perspective, what is the relation between students' first and second language?  
Do you think students with good first language skills will also have good second language skills?
6. What do you expect from your students by the end of the semester?
7. What kind of outcomes have you observed from (allowing / not allowing) your students to use the mother tongue in the classroom?
8. What do you think about your students' emotions during the classroom especially if you allow/disallow the use of their first language? Nervous? Anxious? Relaxed? Happy?  
More talking? Less talking? Motivated?

Appendix D  
Research Ethics Committee Approval

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Ministry of Education  
Jazan University



المملكة العربية السعودية  
وزارة التعليم  
جامعة جازان

Standing Committee for Scientific Research - Jazan University (HAPO-10-Z-001)	Reference No.: REC-43/09/214.
Research Title: The Role of First Language in Second Language classroom	Date of decision: 13 April 2022
Principal Investigator: Dr. Ruqayyah Nasser Moafa	Sponsor: -

**The following item  have been received and reviewed in connection with the above study to be conducted by the above investigator.**

- Application for Research Ethics Committee approval
- Research proposal/protocol
- Patient Information Sheet & Consent Form
- Questionnaire
- Investigator's CV.

**The committee's decision is:**

- Approved
- Modification required (item specified below or in a accompanying letter)
- Rejected (reasons specified below or in a accompanying letter)

**Comments: Investigator is required to:**

1. Report any protocol deviation/violations to the Ethics Committee.
2. Provide progress and closure reports to the Ethics Committee.

**Members of Standing Committee for Scientific Research:**

Dr . Hassan Ahmad Alhazmi	College of Pharmacy- Jazan University
Dr . Ibrahim Metaan Qosadi	College of Medicine- Jazan University
Dr. Othman Mousa Hakami	College of Science- Jazan University
Dr. Essam Ibrahim Al-Aqeeli	College of Medicine- Jazan University
Dr. Zakaria Ahmed Zakri	College of Sharia and Law- Jazan University
Dr. Mohammed Haidar Badedi	General Directorate of Jazan Health Affairs
Mr. Bandar Hassan Al-Fifi	Committee Secretary- Jazan University

**Chairman of Standing Committee for Scientific Research**

Dr.\ Hassan Ahmad Alhazmi

Date and Signature

المرفقات:

التاريخ: .....

الرقم: .....

**Appendix E**  
**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The more students use English at school, the more their English will improve.	4.46	1.042
My students are never allowed to use their first language in classes.	3.03	1.127
The student should not use their first language in the classroom at all.	2.97	1.153
I would clarify instructions for students using their first language in classes.	3.20	1.152
Allowing the students to use their first language in class would increase motivation and decrease anxiety.	3.35	1.164
It would be helpful to allow my students to explain grammar points to each other in their native language.	3.31	1.207
When students are working on an assignment in the classroom, they should use English exclusively.	3.89	1.042
I do not let my students speak their first language because it is difficult for me to understand what they are saying.	2.69	1.098
In my opinion, students can better master English vocabulary by using their native language.	2.77	1.201
It would be better to use an English-English dictionary than a dictionary in students' first languages.	3.83	1.047
English is best learned by translating between the students' first language and English.	2.77	1.168
In contrast to English, students' first languages would be a better medium for explaining abstract and difficult concepts.	3.29	1.146
Tips on English learning should be offered in students' first language.	2.81	1.107
Whenever I see students using their first language in class, I remind them to use English.	4.24	.704
If support were given in students' first language, they might have a better chance of following the lesson.	3.08	1.086

\*Note: All items scored on a 5-point scale. N = 104.

**Appendix F**

**SPSS output for four factors extracted Factor Matrix**

	1	2	3	4
The more students use English at school, the more their English will improve.			0.717	
My students are never allowed to use their first language in classes.		0.559		
The student should not use their first language in the classroom at all.		0.576		
I would clarify instructions for students using their first language in classes.	0.626			
Allowing the students to use their first language in classes would increase motivation and decrease anxiety.	0.800			
It would be helpful to allow my students to explain grammar points to each other in their native language.	0.614			
When students are working on an assignment in the classroom, they should use English exclusively.		0.323		
I do not let my students speak their first language because it is difficult for me to understand what they are saying.		0.528		
In my opinion, students can better master English vocabulary by using their native language.	0.561			
It would be better to use an English-English dictionary than a dictionary in students' first languages.		0.436		
English is best learned by translating between the students' first language and English.	0.550			
In contrast to English, students' first languages would be a better medium for explaining abstract and difficult concepts	0.559			
Tips on English learning should be offered in students' first language.	0.453	0.532		
Whenever I see students using their first language in class, I remind them to use English.				0.429
If support were given in students' first language, they might have a better chance of following the lesson.	0.693			