

The Use of L1 by Jordanian EFL Teachers in their English Classes: (A Case Study)

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the use of L1 (Arabic) by Jordanian EFL teachers in their English classes. A checklist that included 10 items was used to compute the frequencies of L1 usage in the EFL classes in Jordan. These items represent common areas where L1 is usually used in an EFL class. This instrument was implemented in 20 lessons presented by a sample of 20 male and female teachers in the region who were selected randomly from a population of 93 teachers, which is the overall number of English teachers in the South Ghour, a small town in the South of Jordan.

The results of the study have shown that, on average, L1 was used in about (52.8%) of the situations in the classes selected when compared to L2 which was used in (46.4%) of the situations. This use of L1 significantly differed between the males and the females, in favor of the males who used more L1 in their classes. This amount of L1 in the EFL the average classes was, in fact, more than it is usually recommended in a communicative class which suggests that the use of L1, though inevitable, should be reduced to the minimum to maintain effective learning of the target language. The study, therefore, recommends that EFL teachers should reduce the amount of L1 used in their EFL classes and have more training on using English as a medium of instruction or 'teaching English through English'.

(Key words: EFL, Mother tongue)

" استخدام اللغة الأم (العربية) في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية من قبل معلمي اللغة
الإنجليزية في الأردن
(دراسة حالة)

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"ملخص الدراسة"

هدفت الدراسة لاستكشاف مدى استخدام معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في مدارس مديرية تربية الأغوار الجنوبية للغة العربية في حصصهم. وقد حاول الباحث من خلال الدراسة تحديد عدة مجالات يتكرر فيها عادة استخدام اللغة الأم في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية. ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة، تم استخدام أداة تكونت من عشر مجالات تم من خلالها حساب تكرارات استخدام اللغة العربية (اللغة الأم للطلبة) مقارنة باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية، وقد تم تطبيق الأداة في عشرين موقف صفي لعشرين معلم ومعلمة لغة إنجليزية تم اختيارهم عشوائياً من مجتمع الدراسة الكلي الذي تضمن 93 معلم ومعلمة لغة إنجليزية في مديرية تربية الأغوار الجنوبية.

أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن اللغة العربية تم تكرر استخدامها بالمتوسط ما نسبته (52.8%) لجميع المجالات للموقف الصفّي الواحد مقابل (46.4%) للغة الإنجليزية. هذه النسبة لاستخدام اللغة العربية في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية تظهر بشكل واضح أكبر مما ينبغي لما يقتضيه الحال في أساليب التدريس المتبعة والموصوفة لتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل عام والتي لا تلغي استخدام اللغة الأم تماماً وإنما تجعله للضرورة فقط وفي الحدود الدنيا لضمان تعلم فعال للغة المستهدفة. ولذلك فإن الدراسة توصي بالحد من استخدام اللغة الأم أثناء تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية وحضور المزيد من الدورات التدريبية في موضوع استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية بتدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بدلا من العربية، أو ما يمكن تسميته "تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية باستخدام اللغة الإنجليزية".

I. Introduction

Many English teachers use their mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the English classroom. Some of them are even more tolerant about the use of L1 (Arabic) as a means of communication with students as well. As a result of this many students become reluctant to use English, and in many cases they use English ineffectively (Krashen 1981).

As an English supervisor, the researcher has observed this situation in many of his supervisory visits to English teachers in the South Ghour where many new teachers overuse Arabic as means of instruction. This situation has often been related to poor performance of many inexperienced teachers in the region, which usually results in poor language teaching and, undoubtedly, affects the students' level of English.

II. Literature review

The use of the learners' mother tongue in a foreign language classroom has always been a controversial issue. In fact, such issue is as old as language teaching itself (Kelly, 1969).

Since the early days of the Grammar Translation the use of L1 has received great attention by language teaching specialists. According to this method L1 was the main medium of instruction in the classroom, and language teaching was mainly memorization of bilingual lists of vocabulary (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)

Contrary to the Grammar Translation method, the use of L1 in the Direct Method and Audio-lingual Methods the use of L1 was banned, and it was even considered a fault in teaching. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)

The communicative Approach, on the other hand, has praised the use of L2 in language teaching; however, adherents of this approach were sometimes tolerant about the use of *L1*, and considered this as the last resort, when explanation in L2 fails (Finnochairo, 1974). French (1963) claimed that the use of the mother tongue is desirable but only when it is inevitable.

Howatt (1984), on the other hand, argued that the foreign language is expected to be the normal means of classroom

communication. However, he retained the use of mother tongue for explaining new words and new grammar points.

Ellis (1985, p. 19) discouraged the use of L1 in the classroom and described its role as "negative one" because of it interferes in learning of a second or a foreign language by transferring features of L1 into L2.

Kharma and Hajjaj (1989), who investigated the attitudes of teachers', the students' and the supervisors' towards the use of the mother tongue in some schools in Kuwait, found that the majority of EFL teachers used Arabic, the students' mother tongue, for a number of different purposes such as explaining difficult lexical items and facilitating second language learning. Based on their findings, they recommended a judicious use of L1 in the EFL classroom which is favoured by both the teachers and their students as well. .

Auerbach (1993) indicated that the use of L1 "reduces anxiety and enhances the effective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates incorporation of learners' life experiences, and allows for learner-centered curriculum development." (p.2)

Atkinson (1993) outlined some of the uses of L1 such as eliciting language, giving instructions, checking comprehension, and testing. However, he did not recommend the overuse of L1 in a class.

Cook (2001) stated that teachers can benefit from the use of the L1 while explaining complicated grammatical rules to their students, explaining and checking meanings of words or sentences. .

Prodromou (2002) who investigated the Greek students' perceptions about the use of L1 in a monolingual class pointed out that both the teachers and the students at the different levels feel that using L1 can help students. Yet, they disagreed about the level of support to this view due to their levels.

Al-Harbi (2010) pointed out that the use of L1 in teaching grammar can be more effective than using L2. She even suggested a method for teaching explicit grammar through 'mother tongue grammar transformation'. She also explained that learners can learn grammar more adequately in their mother tongue as they usually

compare and contrast the rules of the second or foreign language to those of their mother tongue.

Khassawneh (2011), who surveyed undergraduate students' attitudes toward using Arabic in EFL classroom at the language center at Yarmouk University in Jordan, found that the attitudes of the students about using Arabic were generally positive. However, she indicated that the weaker students were more supportive of the use of L1 in the English classes. The researcher concluded that teachers should not have negative feelings towards using English because L1 has essential roles in facilitating the learning of L2.

In general, the review of literature on using L1 in teaching English have shown general agreement that the use of L1 in the EFL class is inevitable. However the majority of language teaching specialists point out that this should be very limited and carefully used. Among the advantages of using L1 suggested were 'reducing anxiety of the learners', 'helping teachers to explain meanings of difficult words', 'motivating students', 'explaining rules of grammar more easily' and 'instructing students in a clearer way'. However, some researchers also believe that the overuse of L1 may negatively affect the students' L2 language input as this reduces their opportunities to practice the foreign language or may transfer the features of L1 into L2.

1.2. Problem of the Study

The present study aims at investigating the use of L1 (Arabic) by English teachers in the EFL classroom in Jordan. The study attempts to identify the areas where English teachers use Arabic in their classes and the amount of L1 used in each area in order to advise these teachers on judicious use more Arabic in their English classes, and, consequently, help them teach their lessons more effectively by using English as a main medium of instruction instead.

1.3. Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do English teachers in Jordan use L1 in their English language classroom?
2. Are there any significant differences between the amounts of L1 used in an average class in Jordan that can be attributed to the sex of the teacher?

1.4. Hypothesis of the study

- There are no significant differences (at the level of $\alpha \leq .05$) between the amounts of L1 used by the males and the females in an average EFL class in Jordan.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the fact that it investigates the use of L1 in the English language classroom which is an important issue in English language teaching. It also provides useful information on the areas where L1 is most frequently used by English teachers as a medium of instruction and language of communication in the class. Moreover, the study uses a different approach to the problem where the teachers' language in the classroom is quantified.

1.6. Limitation of the Study

1. The results of the study are limited to the population it investigates (i.e., English teachers in South Ghour Directorate of Education).
2. The results of the study are also limited to the ten areas where L1 is used that are included in the study instrument.
3. The teachers' qualification and experience were not taken into account as most of the teachers observed were relatively new and have almost the same qualifications (B.A in English).

1.7. Definition of terms

- *EFL* is English as a foreign language.
- *L1* is the learners' mother tongue. In this study it refers to Arabic.
- *L2* is target language that is being taught or learned. In our case it is English.
- *South Ghour* is a town in the Southern part of Jordan.

III. Methods and Procedures

The present study can be classified as a descriptive survey which collects data through field investigation. The purpose of data collection is mainly to answer the research questions concerning the population of the study, and testing the hypothesis related to the use of L1 by EFL teachers in Jordan.

3.1. The Population and Sample

The population of the consisted of 93 male and female English teachers which is the overall number of English teachers in South Ghour Directorate of Education.

The study sample consisted of 10 male and 10 female English teachers in South Ghors Directorate of Education. These teachers were selected randomly. Most of these teachers were relatively new. The teaching experience of most of these teachers ranged between (2 - 8) years as this region is located in a remote area which characterized by having new teachers in many subjects including English.

3.2. The Instrument of the Study

The researcher used a checklist which included 10 items representing the main areas where EFL teachers use L1 in their classes. The aim of the instrument is to compute the frequencies of each of these uses of L1 in normal classroom teaching. The details of this instrument are in appendix (1)

3.3. Validity

The items of the study instrument were adapted mainly form a validated teacher's questionnaire used by Kayyali (2006), which was used in an investigation of the reasons of using L1 by English teachers in their lessons. However, the researcher converted these items to a classroom observation checklist.

3.4. Reliability

The researcher used inter-rater reliability which was established by asking another observer to apply the instrument at the same time. Then, the results given by the two observers were compared. The differences between the two judgments were very low, and ranged between (15%-19 %) for all the items.

3.5. Data Collection

The data were collected by means of the observation checklist by the researcher himself in his regular supervisory visits to English teachers in the region. Each teacher was visited once only. In this study, the researcher used sentences and statements as a base for counting the frequencies of L1 and L2 usage by the teachers during the lesson.

3.6. Design of the study and statistical analysis

The study mainly used quantitative methods where the researcher tried to quantify the use of L1 by English teachers in South Ghour Directorate of Education.

The statistical analyses used in the study were mainly the percentages and the frequencies of the use of L1 for each of the stated reasons in the study instrument. T-test of two independent samples was also employed to test the study hypothesis. The data were analyzed by using SPSS 9.0.

The dependent variable in the study was the language of instruction used by the teachers in their classes which can either be *L1 (Arabic)* or *L2 (English)*. The independent variable was the sex of the teachers observed.

IV. The Results of the Study

The study investigated the use of *L1* in the FEL classes by English teachers in South Ghour Directorate of Education. In order to answer the research questions the researcher identified a number of areas where EFL teachers usually use L1 in a class and computed the frequencies and percentages of the teachers' usage of L1 and L2 in the class in each of then areas. Table (1) below shows the Frequencies of L1 and L2 usage by the EFL teachers in the study.

Table (1)
Average of Frequencies of L1 and L2 Usage by EFL Teachers in a Class

No	Teacher's Activity	Frequencies			Percentages		
		L1	L2	T	L1	L2	T
1.	Giving instructions about what to do in the lesson	21.6	19.7	42.0	51.4%	46.9%	100%
2.	Explaining meanings of new/ difficult words, phrases, or sentences.	10.5	10.5	22.0	47.7%	47.7%	100%
3.	Giving help to individual students e.g. during individual or pair work...	13.2	9.9	23.1	57.1%	42.9%	100%
4.	Explaining grammatical points in the lesson.	5.4	4.6	10.0	54.0%	46.0%	100%
5.	Asking or explaining questions that students do not understand.	12.0	11.2	23.2	51.7%	48.3%	100%
6.	Explaining reading or listening comprehension passages.	5.5	7.0	12.5	44.0%	56.0%	100%
7.	Conducting part of classroom discussions on TEFL subjects.	9.7	8.3	18.0	53.9%	46.1%	100%
8.	Greeting and taking leave from their students.	1.7	2.4	4.1	41.5%	58.5%	100%
9.	Motivating students or giving feedback on certain points	12.4	11.7	24.1	51.5%	48.5%	100%
10.	Speaking about Non-TEFL purposes in the class.	17.2	10.7	27.9	61.6%	38.4%	100%
Total		109	96	207	52.8%	46.4%	100%

The study instrument identified 10 different areas where English teachers used either *L1* or *L2* in their lessons. The above table shows the averages of frequencies and percentages of both *L1* and *L2* usage in the classes.

As can be seen in the table, the overall number of the frequencies of *L1* usage in an average class visited was 109, and the number of frequencies of *L2* usage was 96, with a percentage of 52.8% for Arabic and 46.4% for English. The results of the study for each area were as follows:

The average of times English teachers in South Ghors Directorate of Education used *L1* for "*giving instructions about what to do in the lesson*" was 21.6 and *L2* 19.7 times with the percentages of 51.4% and 46.9% for the two respectively.

The use of *L1* and *L2* for "*Explaining meanings of new/ difficult words, phrases, or sentences*" was 10.5 times i.e. 50% for each of the two. "*Giving help to individual students e.g. during individual or pair work...*" was done 13.2 times i.e. 57.1% in *L1* and 9.9 times or 42.9% in *L2*. "*Explaining grammatical points in the lesson*" was done 5.4 times in *L1* and 4.6 times with the percentages of 54.0 % and 46.0 % for the *L1* and *L2* respectively. The use of English for "*Asking or explaining questions that students do not understand*" was done 12.0 times i.e. 51.7% in *L1* and 11.2 times i.e. 48.3% in *L2*. "*Explaining reading or listening comprehension passages*" was repeated 5.5 times in *L1* i.e. 44.0% % and 7.0 times i.e. 56.0% in *L2*. For "*conducting part of classroom discussions on TEFL subjects*" *L1* was used 9.7 times or 53.9% whereas *L2* was used 8.3 times or 46.1%. The percentages of *L1* and *L2* in both "*Greeting and taking leave from their students*" and "*motivating students or giving feedback on certain points*" were repeated 12.4 times for *L1* and 11.7 times for *L2* with the percentages of 51.5% and 48.5% for the two respectively. "*Speaking about Non-TEFL purposes in the class*" was done 17.2 times in *L1* or 61.6% and 10.7 times or 38.4% in *L2* during the average lesson of the 20 lessons observed.

In order to determine whether the amount of *L1* used by *L1* differs according to their sex, a T-test of two independent samples was

employed. Table (2) below shows the descriptive statistics for both the L1 and L2 usage in the classes observed.

Table (2)
Results of the T-test of the Use of L1 for the Males and Females

The Use of L1	Sex	N	M	Std. Dev	df	t	Sig P-Value
Teachers Overall Usage of L1 in the EFL classroom	Male	10	122.6	13.3	18.0	3.125	0.034*
	Female	10	95.8	23.6	14.2	3.125	

As can be seen in the above table, the value of (P) is .034 which indicates clearly that significant differences (at the level of $\infty \leq .05$) did exist between the males (M=122.6) and females (M = 95.8) in favor of the males who used L1 more frequently in their EFL classes. As a result, the null hypothesis that 'there are no significant differences between the L1 usage between the males and females' is rejected.

V. Discussion of the Results and General Conclusions:

The results of the study have shown that the amount of L1 used in the EFL classroom by English teachers in the South Ghour Directorate was clearly very high, which is even more than the amount of L2 (English) used by these specific teachers. This amount of L1 might be more than it is prescribed in a communicate classroom which recommends the use of L1 only when necessary, but not repeatedly or extensively as explained by Finnochairo (1974), French (1963), Howatt (1984) Gower and Walters (1985) and many others. Such over emphasis of the use of L1 in the EFL context might affect the L2 comprehensible L2 input which Krashen (1981) emphasized.

Although the results of the T-test have shown significant differences between the males and females in the amount of L1 they used in their classes, this can still be termed as higher than recommended.

The results have also shown clearly that there were very few areas of the ten items identified in the study instrument where English

was used more frequently than L1 (Arabic) in the average English class, even in situations where English was supposed to be the dominant language such as practicing new language functions and structures.

In general, many of these English teachers observed were reluctant to use English possibly because they feel that Arabic is much easier for them when they try to explain meanings or give instruction their students about difficult tasks. Some of these teachers also complained that their students' level of English is very low and thus using L1 can help them more than using L2. Yet, in most of the cases, the observed teachers did not give their students a chance to understand meanings in English, and always gave the Arabic equivalents with very little or no effort, sometimes, to change their teaching techniques such as using contexts, giving examples or demonstrating meanings to these students.

In fact, many of the teachers observed hold negative attitudes about the students' level of English and lack confidence in their own ability to use English in the classes. Many of them even feel uncertain about the effectiveness of L2 as a main medium of instruction.

The results of the study, therefore, guide researchers and practitioners in the field about the areas which need more attention by the teachers through providing research evidence based on the actual teaching practice in the classroom. Moreover, the study proposes a new observation tool which helps to control the amount of L1 used in an EFL class for the purpose of achieving balance in our EFL classes and lead to a judicious use of L1 depending on the EFL context in which language is taught.

In the light of the results that have been shown so far, the study recommends the following:

A- EFL teachers are recommended to be aware of the importance of using English in their EFL classes and encourage their students to do so

B- The Ministry of Education is recommended to provide training programmes for English teachers that provide them with applicable strategies that help them avoid the over dependence on Arabic in teaching English.

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Appendix One
The study Instrument

No.	Teacher's Activity	Frequencies	
		L1	L2
1.	Giving instructions about what to do in the lesson		
2.	Explaining meanings of new/ difficult words, phrases, or sentences.		
3.	Giving help to individual students e.g. when students work individually or in pars...		
4.	Explaining grammatical points in the lesson.		
5.	Asking or explaining questions that students do not understand.		
6.	Explaining reading or listening comprehension passages.		
7.	Conducting part of classroom discussions on TEFL subjects.		
8.	Greeting and taking leave from their students.		
9.	Motivating students or giving feedback on certain points		
10.	Speaking about Non-TEFL purposes in the class.		
Total			