



## Sudanese Pupils' Attitude towards the Use of L1 in L2 Classroom

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### Abstract:

This study aims at surveying pupils' views on the use of L1 in the classroom, and how much Arabic they desired to be used in their classes. To achieve the set objectives, the study used descriptive method; it employed a questionnaire to address the study questions and objectives. 250 pupils completed the questionnaire. The study found out that pupils demonstrated positive attitude towards the use of L1 within English classes. It is also found that pupils desired about 20% to 40% of class time be used in Arabic language.

**Keywords:** *First language, Second language, Arabic language, classroom*

المستخلص :

هدفت الدراسة إلى استطلاع آراء الطلاب حول استخدام اللغة الأولى (اللغة العربية) في دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية وكم من اللغة الأولى يرغب الطلاب في استخدامه داخل الفصل. استخدمت الدراسة الاستبانة لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، شارك 250 طالباً في الدراسة. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن الطلاب قد أبدوا آراء إيجابية لإستخدام اللغة العربية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية وأن نسبة اللغة العربية المستخدمة يجب أن لاتزيد من 20%-40%

### Introduction :

The use of first language in second language classroom has been the subject of much debates and considerable controversial issue for several years. Advocates of communicative approach argue that L2 (second language) should be the language of instruction. However, there are no criteria that prescribe definitely how much L2 use is necessary or ideal. The question of whether to use L1 or L2 is ongoing debate among language teachers and researchers. This study is set out to answer the following questions:

1-How much Arabic as (L1) is used in English classes?

2-What are the attitudes of pupils towards using Arabic in the EFL classes?

### Objectives of the study

The primary goal of this study is to shed light on pupils' views on the use of L1 in the classroom, and how often they like Arabic to be used in their English classes.

### 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) used questionnaire in their study. 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 used an interview in his study, 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) used video recording for 13 teachers' classes and questionnaire. They 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 (1991) 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 used questionnaire in their study, and 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.

The interview data collected in English high schools by Macaro (1997) on learners' reactions to their teachers' exclusive use of the TL revealed that they fell into two categories (p.103). Whilst a minority of the most able students did not get frustrated when being exposed to large quantities of the TL, the majority reacted strongly against being exposed to the TL without knowing the exact meaning of words (p.103). Although the views of the two groups diverged, they reached a consensus on the importance of understanding teachers' instructions for classroom activities and homework, preferring this information in L1. Although not all learners rejected the use of the TL (and a minority were ready to accept TL exclusivity), they all agreed on the need to receive instructions in the L1. While Macaro's study (1997) investigated high school learners' reactions toward TL exclusivity, Levine's project (2003) examined university students' level of anxiety in relation to the quantity of TL use. Using an Internet based questionnaire answered by 600 students and 163 instructors from the United States and Canada, this study compared student and instructor belief concerning the relation between TL use and student anxiety. Contrary to hypothesized outcomes, Macaro found that the amount of TL usage correlated negatively with students' sense of anxiety and concluded that students reported feeling less anxious when exposed to increased FL amounts than their teachers perceived them to be (Levine, 2003, p.352). A point of interest is that while 40% of the students agreed that they felt 'anxious using FL' and 59.9% of instructors predicted this anxiety, 63% of both groups agreed or strongly agreed with the questionnaire



item , ‘It is a rewarding or worthwhile challenge ’ to ‘have to use the FL to communicate (rather than fall back on English)’ (p.351) .

Finally Chavez’s study (2003) explored the different functions that learners attribute to both the L1 and the TL in the language classroom, which she views as a ‘diglossic’ environment. She used a questionnaire of 158 items to investigate the issue with students in first year language classes at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. The results indicated that students preferred the L1 to approach ‘the most pressing and genuine communicative purposes, such as matters related to evaluation and grammatical ‘knowledge’ (p.193). In contrast, the students viewed the TL as appropriate to perform repetitive activities involving the practice of forms. The above studies on students’ views all highlight a number of contextual factors that may have an influence on their preferences for L1/TL distribution. Macaro (1997) noted a possible impact of teachers’ methods on students’ opinion on L1 exclusivity (p.104). Levine (2003) lists a number of student characteristics (age, gender) and classroom variables (instructor) that may have influenced students’ reported views on the relation between TL a mount and anxiety (p.348). Chavez’s study carefully describes the institutional context (departmental policy regarding L1 use, teacher training, instructor status) and teaching approach (‘a communicative four skills curriculum’) indicating the importance of those contextual features for understanding student views. One could hypothesize that student experience of specific teaching methods or classroom practices is particularly important in shaping students’ views on L1/TL use.

Tang (2002) studied the use of the L1 by Chinese teachers of English as well as their learners’ attitudes towards it. He used a

questionnaire and an interview in his study, and the results showed that both teachers and learners responded positively to using the L1 as a supportive and facilitating teaching tool. Schweers (1999) investigated the attitudes towards using the L1 of teachers and learners in an EFL context where the L1 was Spanish. He used a questionnaire in his study and 35 recorded minutes from different level classes; this study also showed that the 22% of the teachers and 88% of the learners agreed that the L1 should be used sometimes. Another survey was conducted by Prodromou (2000), with Greek Learners of English. He used a questionnaire in his study, and found that most beginners and intermediate learners, but only a minority of advanced learners, felt the use of the L1 in the English classroom was acceptable. Finally, a study conducted by Qoura (2005) examined Saudi Arabian teachers and learners attitude towards using Arabic in EFL classrooms. He used a questionnaire in his study, in line with earlier studies; the results 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. Overall, then, there is much evidence that teachers’ and learners’ attitudes to the use of the L1 in English lessons are positive.

Zheng (2004) tried to address the question: will it make a difference if reading comprehension questions are set in learners’ L1 instead of English L2? He adapted experiments in the study, it showed that setting questions in learners’ L1 or L2 will make no significant difference in learners’ reading comprehension if their competences in L1 and L2 are both sufficient for the task. Shohamy (1984) found that multiple-choice questions in L1 were easier than the same questions translated into L2. However, contrary to these studies, Chen et al



(1997) found in their study the use of L1 or L2 as the index of comprehension of L2 texts did not make any significant difference in the students' L2 reading performance.

Jihad & Turki (1997) examined the role of the Arabic language in assessing reading comprehensions in the foreign language (English). He used experimental method. The results showed that the subjects who were tested in Arabic performed better than their counterparts who took the English test version. However, the advanced subjects in the two groups did equally well regardless of the test version they took. Al-Absi (1991) investigated the effect of incorporating Arabic in the teaching of English to Jordanian students. He used experiments in his study; the findings provided evidence favor of this method. Siti & Hameed (2006) aimed at investigating the effectiveness of the use of L1 to generate ideas for second language writing among low proficiency ESL learners. They employed experimental research. The findings showed a marked improvement in the writing performance of students who used their first language to generate ideas before using their second language for writing.

To conclude this part on literature review, researchers have found out that the practice of English-only is neither conclusive nor pedagogically sound. In fact it is often detrimental to the students and the learning process. The findings presented in this study indicate that the use of L1 in the classroom can be effective, and is perhaps necessary in certain

#### **The study methodology**

The study adopted descriptive methods. The study used a questionnaire for the purpose of data collection. The detailed of the questionnaire as follows: The pupils questionnaire ( PsQ. ) , consists of 10 statements , it was divided into

situations. *“Although the mother tongue is not a suitable basis for a methodology, it has, at all levels, a variety of roles to play which are at present, consistently undervalued”*. (Atkinson, 1987:247).

In summary, findings from studies on L1 use indicate the following:

1- In a teaching context in which there is TL exclusivity, such as in the English context (Macaro, 1997), only a minority of able students accepted such exclusivity; the majority demonstrated negative reactions. Moreover, there was a consensus among students that' frame work oriented interactions dealing with instructions should be performed in the L1.

2- No correlation has been found between increase in TL amount and anxiety.

3- Students share two main pedagogical functions to the L1: as medium of interaction associated with target language and management of the course.

4- A number of contextual factors such as teaching methods, instructors, and departmental policies are hypothesized to influence student views on L1/TL use.

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 pupils.

four parts. The following table gives a brief of the questionnaire:

*Summary of questionnaire*



**Statements**

- Pupils' attitudes towards the use of L1 (Arabic language) in explaining grammar.
- Pupils' attitudes towards the use of L1 (Arabic language) in explaining vocabulary.
- Pupils' attitudes towards the use of L1 (Arabic language) as a framework-oriented strategy.

**Questionnaire sample**

The samples of this study included 250 pupils at secondary level in Khartoum. As it is known, all the pupils in Sudan enter secondary school, after spending four years studying English at basic school. All the pupils are aged 14-17 years old. They all speak Arabic as their first language; students were selected from different grades.

**Validity of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire of this study, was validated by a jury consisting of five assistant professors specialized in English language. They based their comments on the following criteria:

- (i) The clarity of the items and instruction.
- (ii) The simplicity of items, and how far they related to the subject.

(iii) The language used.

The jury made some remarks concerning some items and suggested modification for these items.

**Reliability of the questionnaire**

In statistics, reliability is the consistency of a set of measurements often used to describe a test. For the reliability of the questionnaire, the study used the split – half method: A measure of consistency where a questionnaire is splitted in two and the score for each half of the questionnaire was compared with one another. The questionnaire was distributed to 10 pupils. The coefficient correlation formula was used to calculate the correlation:

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

The analysis shows that there was strong positive correlation between the answers given to the items asked:

PsQ. = 067%

**Procedures**

The pupils' questionnaire was distributed to them in their classes and every item was

translated to them by the researcher and the pupils were given enough time for filling.

**Results and Discussion**

The pupils' questionnaire addressed various aspects relating to the usage of Arabic within an English classroom, it included 10 items divided into four parts.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I find it easier to understand the grammar	130(52%)	76(30.4%)	12(4.8%)	19(7.6%)	13(5.2%)	250(100%)





of English language when teacher explains it in Arabic.						
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The survey showed that 82.4% of the pupils questioned agreed that they find it easier to understand the grammar of English language when the teacher explains it in Arabic. This indicates that L1 facilitates the understanding of grammar.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
When teacher explains how sentences are constructed in English language, I prefer the explanation in Arabic.	101(40.4%)	72(28.8%)	30(12%)	34(13.6%)	13(5.2%)	250(100%)

In the same respect, 69.2% of the pupils questioned agreed that they prefer explanations of English sentence constructions in Arabic, while only (47)18.8% stated that they disagreed. This finding implies that students are likely to prefer the explanation of a sentence construction in Arabic language.

With respect to pupils' overall attitudes to the use of L1 in explaining grammar, the survey showed that 82.4% of the pupils agreed that they find it easier to understand English language grammar when the teacher explains it in Arabic. Furthermore, 69% of the pupils agreed that they prefer the explanation of English sentence construction in Arabic. The majority of pupils find grammar explanation

easier to grasp in L1. This indicates the preference for the use of L1 to explain grammar points. This could be due to pupils believe that their knowledge of L1 may help to promote knowledge about the linguistic features of the TL, particularly about vocabulary and grammar. Similar conclusions were reached in Chavez's study (2003), which showed that students prefer L1 use to learn grammatical knowledge. Swain&Lapkin (2000) asserted that "*L1 helps learners focus attention on form when accessing complex grammatical problem*". This finding is also in harmony with Mustafa (2008), stating: "70% of the students prefer the use of L1 in explaining new grammatical rules".

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I like my teacher to use Arabic to translate Vocabulary items.	140(56%)	69(27.6%)	17(6.8%)	13(5.2%)	11(4.4%)	250(100%)



83.6% of the pupils questioned agreed that they like their teacher to use the Arabic language to translate vocabulary items, while only 11.2% of those questioned stated that they disagreed. This strongly indicates that pupils prefer the translation of vocabulary items.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
When I don't know a word in English; I prefer to have it explained in Arabic.	132(52.8%)	84(33.6%)	7(2.8%)	15 (6%)	12(4.8%)	250(100%)

More than four fifths (86.4%) of the pupils questioned prefer the explanation of a word in Arabic when they don't know its meaning in English, while (10.8%) stated that they disagreed. This highly implies that pupils would prefer a word to be explained in Arabic when they fail to grasp it in the target language.

Regarding pupils' overall attitudes towards the use of Arabic in explaining vocabulary items, 83.6% of the pupils agreed that they'd prefer their teacher to use Arabic to translate vocabulary items, while only 11.2% stated they've disagreed. Concerning whether translating vocabulary items into Arabic helps pupils to learn the items, 87.4% stated they agree with the notion that translating vocabulary items aids in learning them, while 8.8% stated that they disagreed. More than four fifths (86.4%) of the pupils prefer the explanation of a word in Arabic when they don't know its meaning in English, (10.8%) stated they disagreed with this notion. Pupils' overall attitudes towards the use

of Arabic in explaining vocabulary items showed that the majority of pupils prefer the use of L1 in explaining vocabulary items, while a minority of pupils prefers the use of L2 to access vocabulary meaning. Several reasons behinds pupils preference for translation of vocabulary items: pupils inadequacies (low language ability, low motivation, poor discipline), difficult lesson content.

Thus, the use of L1 helps to gain control of relevant L2 vocabulary, showing incredible support of L1 in context. Knight (1996) also made these similar findings. Furthermore, giving the meaning of a word in L1 could work out when other techniques fail; Hitotuzi (2006) believed that: *“One can use flashcards cutout figure and realia for word representing concrete items; as for the representation of abstract items, drawing an L1 equivalent might solve the problem when other techniques fail to gloss them convincingly”*.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I think the teacher should give instructions (about exercise, activities and homework.etc.) in Arabic.	48(19.2%)	51(20.4%)	27(10.8%)	76(30.4%)	48(19.2%)	250(100%)



39.6% of the pupils questioned agreed that teachers should give instruction about exercises, activities and homework in Arabic, while 49.6% stated that they disagreed, and 10.8% stated that they are not sure. The above finding clearly indicates that pupils have negative attitudes regarding giving the instruction in Arabic. Although it is true that explaining an activity in the target language is genuine communication at in the target language.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Lesson outlines only should be given in Arabic.	64.(25.6%)	60(24%)	28(11.2%)	49(19.6%)	49(19.6%)	250(100%)

Half of the pupils 49.6% questioned agreed with the notion that lesson outlines should only be given in Arabic, while (98) 41.2% stated that they disagreed, and 11.2% stated that they are not sure. The above results indicate the lack of consensus among pupils whether lesson outlines should be given in Arabic.

Concerning overall attitudes towards the use of L1 (Arabic language) as a framework-oriented strategy. Half of pupils (49.6%) agreed that lesson outlines should only be given in

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I expect that a teacher who uses only English language in the class is less approachable than the one who uses Arabic.	110(44%)	70(28%)	26(10.4%)	27(10.8%)	17(6.8%)	250(100%)

More than two thirds 72% of the pupils agreed that teacher who uses only English language in the class is less approachable than the one who uses Arabic, while only 17.2% stated they disagreed, and 10.4% stated that they are not

very low levels, they can be rather complicated to set up. In some cases a satisfactorily compromise perhaps is to give the instructions in the target language and to ask for their repetition in students' language in order to ensure that everyone fully understands what to do (David:1987). Macar's study (1997) found a consensus among English students in favor of the performance of classroom instruction

Arabic, while 41.2% stated that they disagreed, and 11.2% stated that they are not sure. These findings show that there is lack of consensus over the role of L1 performance in framework-oriented strategy. This difference may be explained by the influence of the teacher classroom practices on learner preferences. However, teachers' practices can be replaced, wherever possible, a corresponding L2 or L1 strategy.

sure. This indicates that L1 easily passes better communication by establishing good relations between pupils and teachers. Not only does the use of L1 develop pupils self-esteem to ask and contribute towards participation, but it also





reduces the misunderstanding between pupils and teachers. Meyer (2008) asserted that: "Permitting the use of L1 may keep the class moving forward, by allowing students to express

*themselves, while making the class more fun and helping them to anchor new L2 vocabulary to L1 concepts."*

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I expect that language teachers who are native Arabic speakers should use Arabic in class when needed.	124(49.6%)	74(29.6%)	24(9.6%)	11(4.4%)	17(6.8%)	250(100%)

The majority of the pupils 79.2% agreed that they expect that language teachers who are native Arabic speakers to utilize Arabic language in class when needed, while the minority of the pupils questioned 11.2% stated that they disagreed, and only 9.6% said that they are not sure. The above results indicate that teachers of English who are native Arabic language speakers should only use Arabic when needed. Here in Sudan, all these teachers, all of whom shared the L1 of their pupils, used L1 inevitably in their L2 teaching, regardless of the level of their pupils. When teachers and pupils share the same L1, it appears that teachers treat L1 as a resource to which they inevitably resort in their teaching practices. It may assume that there must be

other factors that played a decisive role in the attitudes towards the use of L1. Pupils speak to the teacher in the mother tongue as a matter of course, even when they are quite capable of expressing what they mean in English. Weschler (1997) quotes: "Teachers should use English where possible and L1 where necessary". We can perhaps say that the questions which teachers need to ask themselves are: - can I justify using the L1 here? So L1 is a consciously chosen option with an auxiliary role; it remains a means to an end. What, then, are the "appropriate times and places" for this means to be taken? Here are some general principles: When it seems realistic, when it helps to engender security...etc

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
I feel more at ease when my teacher uses Arabic.	115(46%)	69(27.6%)	24(9.6%)	28(11.2%)	14(5.6%)	250(100%)

More than two thirds of the pupils questioned 73.6% agreed that they felt at ease when their teacher used Arabic, 16.8% stated that they

disagreed, and 9.6% stated that they are not sure. This strongly implies that the usage of Arabic contributes towards pupils' comfort level. The



absence of student's first language when explaining the unfamiliar can raise the level of anxiety among students. Indeed, according to Brown, language anxiety has a strong affective influence on second language acquisition (Brown, 2000: 150). Language anxiety can be broken down into three components:

- 1) *Communication apprehension, arising from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas*
- 2) *Fear of negative social evaluation, arising from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others*
- 3) *Test anxiety or apprehension over academic evaluation* (Brown, 2000: 151).

Allowing the use of the first language in the classroom will mitigate all three components. Communication apprehension can be mitigated

because the students' first language allows them to "adequately express their thoughts and ideas." Fear of negative social evaluation can be reduced, because students are able to communicate directly with each other and have the opportunity to make a positive social impression. Test anxiety can be reduced, by allowing instructions to be given in the first language during evaluations, at beginner or lower levels. Increased comprehension of classroom interaction acts to decrease anxiety and increase motivation. This finding is inconsistent with Macar's study (1997) which suggested that "TL amount correlated negatively with students' sense of anxiety and concluded that students reported feeling less anxious when exposed to increased FL amounts than their teachers perceived them to be".

Statement	Very much	Much	Not sure	Little	Very little	Total
Using Arabic in English class helps you learn this language.	105(42%)	65(26%)	19(7.6%)	32(12.8%)	29(11.6%)	250(100%)

More than two thirds (68%) of the pupils think that using Arabic language helps them much to learn English, while 24.4% said little, and only 7.6% said they are not sure. The above figures suggest that using Arabic language aids in the learning of English. The same result was arrived at by Schweers(1999) stated that students desire up to 39% of the class time to be spent in L1. As far as this research is concerned, pupils' L1 is seen as 'the greatest asset to help in the task of foreign language learning. Therefore, Arabic serves, amongst other things, as an effective pedagogical tool that mediates learning in EFL classes.

#### CONCLUSION

This study tried to shed light on pupils' attitude towards the use of L1 in L2 classroom, and to

what extend do they like Arabic to be used in English classroom. The results of this study showed that Pupils strongly supported the use of L1 especially in: grammar and vocabulary explanation. One thing more, they asserted that they felt friendlier and more relaxed with teachers who used their mother tongue inside the class. Similar findings were arrived at by Chavez's study (2003) who indicated that students preferred the L1 to approach 'the most pressing and genuine communicative purposes,' such as matters related to evaluation and grammatical 'knowledge'. Further, pupils' desired about 20% to 40% of class time be used in Arabic language. This finding is in agreement with a study by Schweers(1999) stating that



students desire up to 39% of the class time be spent in L1.

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