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Using the Native Language in English Foreign Language Classrooms at Azawiya University

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the issue of political activity in Fezzan, There are two essential opposing approaches regarding the influence of first-language use in the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language: the bilingual and the monolingual approaches. Some linguists verify that students' first Language facilitates the procedure of learning a target language, while others argue it should be excluded from their English classes. This paper aims to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of first language in their English classes, by the teachers and by the learners themselves. The current study also identified the factors that caused the students to shift from the target language to their native language. This study was carried out at the academic year 2022-2023 at Azawiya University. A mixed-method approach was employed for data collection and analysis. One hundred and nineteen first year students who study English as a foreign language participated in the survey questionnaire and eight students of them participated in semi structured interviews. The results showed that the students to some extent had positive attitude towards the use of their native language in the easing of their target language learning. By mentioning the recent theories of target language acquisition and reviewing literature, it can be concluded that students' native language has an essential and

easing role in acquiring a foreign language under certain circumstances.

استخدام اللغة الأم في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية الأجنبية بجامعة الزاوية

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الملخص:

هناك نهجان أساسيان متعارضان بالنسبة لتأثير استخدام اللغة الأولى في تعلم وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: النهج ثنائي اللغة وأحادي اللغة. يؤكد بعض اللغويين أن اللغة الأم للطلاب تسهل إجراءات تعلم اللغة الهدف، بينما يرى آخرون أنه يجب استبعادها من دروس اللغة الإنجليزية. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى استكشاف اتجاهات الطلاب نحو استخدام اللغة الأولى في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية، من قبل المعلمين ومن قبل المتعلمين أنفسهم. كما حددت الدراسة الحالية العوامل التي أدت إلى تحول الطلاب من اللغة الهدف إلى لغتهم الأم. أجريت هذه الدراسة في العام الدراسي 2022-2023 في جامعة الزاوية. تم استخدام نهج مختلط الأسلوب لجمع البيانات وتحليلها. شارك في الاستبيان مائة وتسعة عشر طالباً من طلاب السنة الأولى الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وشارك ثمانية طلاب منهم في مقابلات شبه منظمة. وأظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب لديهم إلى حد ما اتجاه إيجابي نحو استخدام لغتهم الأم في تسهيل تعلم اللغة المستهدفة. ومن خلال ذكر النظريات الحديثة لاكتساب اللغة الهدف ومراجعة الأدبيات، يمكن استنتاج أن اللغة الأولى للطلاب لها دور أساسي وميسر في اكتساب لغة أجنبية في ظل ظروف معينة.

Introduction

English language plays a significant role in nearly every facet of modern life. Consequently, learning English as a foreign language has grown for the last decades (Hasman, 2000). Also, English has become a worldwide language. People with diverse linguistic backgrounds and cultures communicate for several purposes in English. Additionally, English has become “a key part in educational strategy in most countries” (Graddol, 2006: 70). Though, the growing need for learning a foreign language has brought noteworthy attention to teach methods and approaches, thus, the medium of instruction and the first language role has become the most central issues that should be taken into account. Two key differing approaches exist concerning the effect of first language use in teaching and learning of English as a foreign language: the bilingual and monolingual approaches. Some specialists as (Phillipson, 1992; Deller & Rinvoluceri, 2002; Vanderheijden, 2010) see learners’ first language as an easing tool in learning the TL (Target Language). On the other hand, Ellis, (1994) and Yaphantides, (2009) believe that the use of L1 as an obstacle in the target language learning.

Several teaching methods through the history of EFL instruction have been employed to aid the learning process. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is the most common one, mainly emphasizes the use of students’ L1 in improving their foreign language acquisition. GTM was described as severely depending on the use of native language in all communication and clarification occurring between teachers and students (Freeman, 2000). This method includes the translation of sentences and vocabularies into the students’ native language, with students’ success being measured by how fruitful these translations might be.

Though GTM is the oldest English language teaching method and has been criticized, some teachers still use it because they are incapable to teach efficiently in the foreign language. Later a method which is contradictory to GTM appeared as the Direct Method. It forbids the use of first language in interactions between students and their teachers. Other less teaching methodologies in terms of using first language are the Audio-Lingual Method, Silent Method and the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, which permitted use of first language only in the easing of language-learning when needed.

Consequently, with regard to these diverse approaches and methods and their view of the use of native language in EFL classes,

the objective of this paper was to discover student's attitude towards the use of native language in English foreign language classes at Azawiya University. Thus, the following research questions were constructed:

- What are the reasons and opinions of EFL students towards the use of first language in English classes at Azawiya University?
- What do students think of the teachers' use of first language in their EFL classes?

Literature Review

Reviewing the literature regarding the use of L1 in EFL classrooms, it is divided into three parts. The first part provides a historical background of the subject. The second part relates to teachers' attitudes towards L1 use in EFL classes, and the last part highlights the need of acknowledging students' attitudes towards L1 use in their classes.

A Historical Background of the Subject

Auerbach (1998) clarified that general view regarding L1 use in EFL classrooms has changed among researchers. From decades ago, L1 use was an approximately worldwide issue and was recognized. Bilingual teaching methods use the L1 and given priority to written communication over verbal. Later during the 19 th century, stress changed toward speaking as monolingual teaching became widespread. Hawks, (2001) pointed out that due to the immigration of people universally, particularly from Europe to America, learners' demographics among EFL students changed, and teachers no longer essentially shared a common first language with their students, who now were mixed in terms of their L1. As a result, for many teachers, the method of teaching has become the target language

Phillipson (1992) indicated that during the colonial teaching period, English became the main culture in the British colonies, and the individuals who had moved to America were compulsory to integrate to get a better life. Therefore, the English language acquired its superiority over other languages. Pennycook (1994) clarified that political and economic factors played an important role in the increase of the monolingual approach, as the preference of native speakers of English as teachers.

Philipson (1992) supported the monolingual approach. He pointed out that the foreign language should be the only medium of communication in the class to increase students' exposure to a foreign

language. He introduced the following four basic policies of successful language teaching: 1. The teacher should be a native English speaker. 2. English should be taught in a monolingual class. 3. It is better to use more English in the class. 4. 'If other languages are used, English standards will drop' (ibid., 1992: 185).

The above mentioned policies led to develop the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, which controlled modern language teaching. This approach precisely follows the monolingual approach in its assertion that language exists for communication. Wringe, (1989) as one of the followers of this approach believes that the target language should be the only means of instruction in the class.

A lot of researchers currently believe that looking for a faultless language teaching method for all situations is fruitless. Many methods can be used in diverse situations. If teachers eliminate students' first language from their learning, they will sacrifice several techniques for teaching the target language (Pacek, 2003).

Teachers' Attitudes towards Using First Language

Many researchers such as Krieger (2005) have focused on teachers' opinions and reasons for using first language in their English classes. He mentioned that in a multilingual classroom, the first language is not the basic medium of communication. He as well stated that it makes students feel that they can depend on their first language for interaction rather than easing TL gaining. Moreover, he believed that teachers should do their best to support students determine when to use their native language and when to avoid this use.

Lin (2005) explained the issue of how students' attitudes are affected by the teachers' use of students' native language. He decided that using English-only is more significant in class with students' specialized in English than one in class with not specialized students. Approximately all the teachers agreed to use the native language with not specialized students. This study indicated that the teachers used their first language in different ways as words or sentences. The study as well showed that the amount of teachers' native language use depended on students' level. They used native language more often with primary students than with more advanced students such as university students.

Borg (2008) carried out a study on the use of native language in English classes and how it impacted the learning process. He held interviews with teachers of English and observed their classes. The study explained that teachers used their first language in translating new thoughts, notions, and vocabulary as well as for classroom management. Likewise, Al-Buraiki (2008) carried out a study on teachers' perceptions of their native language use in English classes. The results were alike to those former studies, as for giving instructions and clarifying new ideas and vocabularies were the essential causes for using native language. Most the participated teachers in this study believed that using first language can assist students in acquiring fluency and it can ease English language acquisition.

Regarding native language use, Kim and Petraki (2009) implemented a study about teachers' perspectives in Vietnam and they used a mixed method approach for collecting data by integrating questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The study examined native and non-native English teachers. The study determined that non-native English teachers used students' first language more often than did native English teachers. On the other hand, both students and teachers agreed that students' native language can be used when clarifying grammatical points, presenting new vocabularies, and managing classrooms.

Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) conducted a study in Iran that inspected the amount of first language use in EFL classes. The study investigated two teachers using two dissimilar ELT methodologies. The first teacher used grammar translation method, depending on translation from the target language to the students' native language. So, native language use was too high. The other teacher used communicative language teaching, and native language use was noticeably lower than with the first teacher. The teachers mentioned that the students' parents gave priority to gaining high grades over language acquisition itself. Therefore, the teachers were compulsory to use the native language rather than the target language.

Hidayati (2012) carried out a study of the use of the Indonesian language to determine the nature of the correlation between first language use and students' participation, in addition to comprehension in EFL classes. The participated teachers used the native language about 30- 49% of class time. The research showed a positive correlation between students' interactions and the amount of time using the first language. The communications were high and vice

versa when teachers spent a high quantity of time using the first language. The study did not discover any new causes behind students' use of their native language. Moreover, the results were like to those of earlier studies. Teachers had used the native language to clarify grammatical points, present new vocabularies, and facilitate social interactions with and among students.

Students' Attitudes towards Using First Language

Students' attitudes regarding first language use is appreciated, as they are straight involved in learning the TL. However, their opinions have not been adequately examined, especially in Libya. Students frequently are not considered alone, but rather in connection with their teachers' attitudes. Satio and Ebsworth (2005) conducted a study of first language use among Japanese students. The students' favorite teachers who know their native language because they found native language use to be useful. The students wanted their teachers to clarify thoughts and present new vocabularies in their native language. The research also pointed out that the students were shocked during their taught by native English speakers who did not permit them to use the native language in their classes.

A study was implemented by Sharma (2006) about the use of the Nepali language in Nepal's secondary schools. Her study focused on the frequency of native language use and the attitudes of students and teachers about using first language. The research revealed that students used their native language more frequently than teachers did (ranging from 51 - 62%). Three percent of the students wished their teachers to use their native language frequently during class. The study showed some contradictory results among students because of the different points of view. About 43% of the students believed that the native language should be used in about 5% of class time. As the students tended to use their first language more frequently than they had wished, however, the research indicated a negative correlation between their wishes and their acts.

Regarding students' attitudes towards native language use in a writing class at a university in Taiwan, Huang (2006) found that the students believed that their teachers should use the native language to clarify grammatical points, brainstorm ideas and explain challenging notions. The students also thought that the use of native language should not comprise more than 25% of class time. The students believed that if teachers used their first language often in their writing classes, their attention to the teachers would be less. A research was

implemented by Nazary (2008) regarding students' attitudes towards native language use among Iranian University students. His research indicated that the students did not prefer to use their native language in English classes. Furthermore, students with different levels had various views towards the use of first language. On the other hand, about 71% of the students preferred their teacher who could speak their first language. A study was conducted by (Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz, 2011) regarding the native language use in EFL classes included students of low- and high level in English. Both students' levels agreed that the communications should be in English and not in their first language.

Also, Afzal (2012) conducted a study on the effect of native language on active and passive vocabularies showed contrasting outcomes. His study showed that when Persian equals are provided as well to English definitions, the vocabularies became more active. Another research regarding the use of native language among university-level EFL learners was conducted by (Alshammari, 2011). The results indicated that about 61% of the students believed that native language should be used in their EFL classes. Furthermore, approximately 68% of the teachers had the same notion. Approximately 53% of the students believed that first language use is helpful in explaining new vocabularies, while 7% believed that the first language is beneficial when giving instructions. Most of the teachers shared the thought that first language use is time-saving. About a quarter (23%) of both teachers and students believed that the L1 should continuously be used in EFL classes. To conclude, in his research regarding teacher attitudes, Hidayati (2012) determined that 35% of students thought that the L1 should be employed for almost 31% of class time. Students demanded that they became confused and, therefore, disinterested when English was used too much in the classes.

Koucka (2007) examined first language use by teacher trainers. Her study showed that new teachers used the first language too commonly. She as well determined that the new teacher used first language in twelve dissimilar situations. This research also showed that the first language was used more when teachers give instructions and translating new vocabularies than in any other situation.

Campa and Nasaji (2009) implemented a study in a different foreign language context regarding teaching English as a foreign language to German students in Canada. Two classes of two diverse teachers were audio-recorded and videotaped. The objective of the

recordings was to find situations in which English was used by the two teachers. Translation from German to English was the most common situation. Another situation was checking the meaning of new vocabularies, as well comparing between the two languages. Classroom management, giving instructions, and communication between the teachers and the students took place in the native language. The research indicated that using native language was also effected by students' culture. The teachers used the students' first language when discussing something related to the students' culture. The study also indicated that new teachers used the native language more frequently than did the experienced teachers.

Research Methodology

The current paper considers the frequency of each item. It follows a mixed method approach for collecting and analyzing data. The data were gathered from two diverse methods: the quantitative data were collected via students' attitudes towards first language use questionnaire (SATLIUQ), which consisting of two parts; causes and views. The qualitative data were collected through Semi Structured Interviews with participants.

Participants

Participants included 119 first year students who study English as a foreign language at Azawiya University; all own the same linguistic background in English.

Instruments

Two main instruments were employed for this study: A questionnaire and semi structured interviews. Below is a detailed description of both tools.

Students' attitudes towards L1 use questionnaire (SATLIUQ)

The first part of data collection was students' attitudes towards L1 use questionnaire which was developed by Al Sharaeai (2012). The first phase of the questionnaire addressed nine reasons make students use their first language. The students were asked to rate the frequency of each reason in terms of "always", "usually", "sometimes" and "never". The second phase of the questionnaire involved eleven participants' opinions regarding first language use in their classes. They were asked to mention the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each point of view.

Semi Structured Interviews

The second tool of data collection is face-to-face Semi Structured Interviews. Creswell (2014) pointed out that interview questions can build a connection between the participants and the researcher. Creswell (2003) pointed out that an interview involves examining and reflecting perceptions in order to gain an understanding of social and human activities. Moreover, qualitative interview data can facilitate a better understanding of the participants' manners, 'thoughts, and actions' (Harris and Brown, 2010: 1). This phase included eight questions relating to the same topics which had been discussed in the survey. The participants were asked to mention how long they had been studying English, in what kinds of situations did they use their mother tongue in class and what did their point of views regarding their teachers who use their L1 to teach English. The interviews provided the qualitative data to collect insights into participants' attitudes towards the use of their first language in their classes.

Data Collection Procedure

Regarding the quantitative data, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to 119 students at the end of the academic year 2022-2023 during regular class hours. Only eight students expressed their interest to participate in the interviews. The semi structured interviews were written and later transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

At the current study, the researcher used a mixed research method. The results of the quantitative data were analyzed by SPSS program to determine the most common reasons and points of views among students' opinions. On the other hand, the qualitative data were analyzed by transcribing the interviews and then content analysis was employed for analysis of data.

Findings

Descriptive Data Analysis

To analyze the first research question regarding the most and least common reasons are making EFL students' use their native language at Azawiya University. The mean of each participant reason was considered. Consequently, the most and least common reasons were determined. Table 1 illustrates the findings of the most common causes used by EFL students at Azawiya University.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Most Common Reasons behind using first Language

Reasons	Mean
In English class I speak my native language because I need to check the meaning of new words in the class.	1.29
In English class I speak my native language with my class fellow when I talk about personal things.	1.26
In English class I speak my native language because my class fellow starts talking to me in my mother tongue when we are working on a task.	1.25
In English class I speak my native language because I want to talk with my class fellow about subjects that may not be related to class.	1.23
In English class I speak my native language with other members of my group who speak my first language because we want to finish class activities faster.	1.18
In English class I speak my native language because I need to ask a class fellow to explain a point in the lesson for me.	1.13
In English classes I speak my native language because I cannot think of the correct word in English when talking to my class fellow	1.11
In English classes I speak my mother tongue because I am clarifying a new point in the lesson to a class fellow.	1.07
In English class I speak my native language with my class fellows because it makes me feel more connected to my culture.	1.04
In English class I speak my native language because I can't think of the words in English, when others may not understand me	1.01

Checking the meaning of new words in the class as seen in table 1 formed the most common cause behind students' use of their first language compared with the other causes ($M=1.29$). Furthermore, speaking with classmates about personal things ($M=1.26$) and they begin speaking to each other in their first language whereas they are occupied on a task ($M=1.25$) were also among the most common causes. In contrast, lack of ability to think of the words in English ($M=1.01$) was the least common cause behind EFL students' use of their first language at Azawiya University.

In contrast, the least and most common views of EFL students regarding use of their first language in EFL classes at Azawiya University were analyzed by considering the mean of each particular view. Consequently, the least and most common views were determined. Table 2 illustrates the results of the most common views used by EFL students at Azawiya University.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the Most Common Opinions behind Using First Language

Opinions	Mean
It's not significant to speak English only in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.	1.60
I speak my native language more frequently than I speak English in English class.	1.46
I prefer to sit near a class fellow who speaks my native language in English class.	1.45
Speaking English only in class makes me feel anxious.	1.40
Speaking my native language with my classmates during and between class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.	1.33
I want to speak my native language in English classes when I need it.	1.23
I think only English is allowed in the English classroom.	1.20
Using dictionaries and resources should be allowed in English classes.	1.14
It is better to have a teacher who is able to understand my native language in English class.	1.09
As my English improves, I became more satisfied speaking only English in English class.	1.08

Table 2 shows that it's not significant to speak English only in class as long as I am completing the tasks formed the least common view on students' use of first language compared with the other views (M=1.60). Among the least common views, I speak my native language more frequently than I speak English in English classes (M=1.46) also I prefer to sit near a class fellow who speaks my native language in English classes (M=1.45). In contrast, because my English improves I feel more satisfied speaking English only in English class (M=1.08) and it is better if the English teacher understand the students' native language (M=1.09) were the most common view behind students' use of their first Language at Azawiya University.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data were collected by using semi structured interviews with eight EFL first year students at Azawiya University. They showed their interest to be interviewed participated in the qualitative data collection The interview questions included eight diverse questions that were rewordings of the students' reasons and opinions towards first language use questionnaire items. The qualitative analyses provide answers to research questions.

The first research question: *What are the students' reasons behind the use of first language in EFL classes at Azawiya University?*

This question aims at defining students' reasons for using their native language in classes. All the students pointed out that they sometimes use their native language during English lessons regardless of their levels. The responses of EFL students at Azawiya University revealed that they have a tendency to use their native language for three dissimilar reasons: to clarify grammatical points, to express themselves properly and to translate.

Clarifying grammatical points

Regarding universal grammar, many language experts such as Chomsky (1976); Ringbom (1987); Harbord, (1992); Stern, (1992) have discussed the relationship between students' native language and the Target Language. Chomsky (1976) clarified that all the existent languages over the world share a number of grammatical structures. Consequently, knowledge from students' first language can be conveyed into Target Language acquisition. Also, students use their grammatical knowledge to comprehend the grammar of the target language (Ringbom, 1987). Moreover, Harbord, (1992); Stern, (1992) stated that transferring knowledge from the native language to the target language used by most foreign language students in most situations.

The results of the interviews show that two out of the eight participants indicated that it is necessity to utilize their native language in grammar classes. They believe that they sometimes do not understand the grammatical points in the target language. Students suggest that their teachers should compare between the two languages. The students use this strategy when facing difficulties to express themselves in the target language.

Sometimes I have to use the Arabic language when I have grammar classes. Because there are some things that should be explained in Arabic and the teacher has to compare between the grammar of English and the grammar of my first language. (Aisha)

When clarifying a grammar rule. I believe it is essential to use the Arabic language. (Yousra)

To better express themselves

Oxford (1990) believed that the students' use their native language as a beneficial tool to compensate the weaknesses in the stages of understanding and production. Therefore, even though the weaknesses, students can understand and produce the TL by using their native language. And so, native language serves as an easing tool to become more skillful users of the target language.

Similarly, the findings of the interview questions revealed that seven of the interviewees stated that they use their first language when they cannot appropriately express themselves in the target language and when they encounter difficulties in communicating with their teachers in the target language as a result of their low skillfulness levels. For example:

I usually use the Arabic language when I do not comprehend some teacher's questions. (Sara)

Sometimes I cannot express myself in English. (Laila)

I use my first language because I'm not good in English. (Sara)

Sometimes I want to ask my teacher but I don't know how to ask him in English. (Fatima)

To translate

Moreover, students in translation lectures need to use their first language. The *Introduction into Translation* is currently taught for first year students at the department of English Language and Translation at Azawiya University.

Consequently, Laila for example stated that they are enforced to use their first language during translation classes: ... *during translation lecture, you have to talk in Arabic language.*

The second research question: *What do students think of their teachers' use of native language in EFL classrooms at Azawiya University?*

The second research question aimed at defining students' opinions towards their teachers' use of their native language. All the interviewees pointed out that their teachers use their native language in their classes.

The results of the interviews revealed that teachers' use of students' first language could be useful in three dissimilar conditions:

when clarifying grammatical items, to assist low-skillful students to be more capable users of English and exposing students to the English language as they could. In contrast, teachers' first language might distract learners' attention from earning the foreign language. The results in this section show the interviews on students' viewpoints on teachers' use of native language.

Explaining grammatical points

The consequences of the interviews revealed that two of the interviewees proposed that teachers' use of first language is beneficial to explain grammatical points.

Also, they proposed that their teachers should make linguistic comparisons during teaching grammar. For example:

It is useful to use our first language since grammar is essential. (Yousra)

Sometimes the grammar teacher has to compare between the first language grammar and the English language grammar. (Aisha)

Low-proficient learner

In this regard, Wilkins (1974) proposed that using students' first language is sometimes useful specifically when using the foreign language causes ambiguity and confusion. The

findings of the interviews support the use of first language for low-level students to ease the foreign language learning process. One of the interviewees stated that it is useful to use the first language because of her low proficiency in English.

I think it's useful and better to us because my English level not well. (Fatima)

Exposing Learners to the Target Language

Auerbach (1993) confirmed that one of the hypotheses of English Language Teaching is that students acquire the foreign language more efficiently and rapidly when they are exposed to the foreign language, in this case they start to think in the foreign language.

Consequently, it reduces students' dependence on the first language. The findings of the interviews revealed that one interviewee proposed that her teachers should expose her to the target language and she believes that students should use English only in order to improve their language skills: *I would like to say that my teachers should use the English language only as it is the best for learning English language. (Sara)*

Distracting Attention

In contrast, two of the interviewees supposed the use of first language confuses their attention in English classes. Two of them believed that using the foreign language and the native language is as doing two dissimilar things at the same time, which they felt to be unsuitable. Shada for example mentioned: *It's confusing since we change from a language to another. It's like doing two dissimilar things.*

Discussion

The first research question aimed at identifying students' causes for using their first language in classes. The findings of the SATLIUQ propose that the students have somewhat positive attitude towards using first language in English classes on needed basis. In general, this result agrees with the previous studies conducted by (Huang, 2006; Al-Buraiki, 2008; Campa & Nasaji, 2009; Kim & Petraki, 2009; Al Shammari, 2011; Hidayati, 2012) which similarly deduce that students have positive attitudes towards using first language in EFL classes.

In the quantitative data of this study, the SATLIUQ was managed to examine students' attitudes towards using first language in EFL classes. The results of the first research question revealed that most of the participants preferred using the first language to verify the meaning of unknown concepts or words during English classes. The findings agree with those of Huang (2006) who mentioned that there is a general agreement that students' first language is commonly used to cope with unknown concepts or words when learning and teaching English as a foreign language.

Moreover, the results of Hidayati's study (2012) show that the students mentioned that they broadly use their first language in social

interactions while talking about personal things with their classmates as well as in the present study. The findings of the questionnaire and the interviews indicate that EFL students at Azawiya University usually use their first language for talking about personal things with their classmates. Furthermore, the results of Campa and Nasaji (2009) support the results of the present study. They implemented a study relating to the teaching of German as a second language in Canada. Two lessons of two dissimilar teachers were audio-recorded and videotaped. The aim of the recordings was to specify situations in which the first language was used by the two teachers. Translation from German to English was the most common situation. Similarly, the results of the of the current study revealed that students' first language is as well broadly used to translate from the target language to first language, especially during lessons of translation. Also, the results of the current study are in line with the results of Hidayati (2012). The findings of the current study demonstrate that first language is used to ease communications among and with students.

Similar to studies in literature (Huang, 2006; Kim & Petraki, 2009;; Khati, 2011), English language students at Azawiya University believe that using their first language is necessary and useful to explain grammatical points and to compare students' first language with the target language during classes of English. Bolitho (1983) mentioned that English foreign language students attend English language classes with their first language in mind; therefore, ignoring the native language during English lessons is unjustified. Campa and Nasaji (2009) asserted that teachers use students' first language to compare the two languages as a mean to ease foreign language learning. Similar to Bolitho (1983) and Campa and Nasaji (2009), the interviewees of this study pointed out that their teachers should compare their foreign language with the first language to enhance understanding of the target language.

The second question in this study examined the views of EFL learners of English as a foreign language at Azawiya University regarding their teachers' use of first language in English classes. Oxford (1990) pointed out that students use their first language as a mean to overwhelm their weaknesses while interacting in the foreign language class. In this regard, first language plays a significant role in easing the process of foreign language learning.

The findings of the second question in the current study are similar to those of previous studies (Nazary, 2008; Khati, 2011; Alshammari, 2011; Saito & Ebsworth, 2004; Huang, 2006).

Although the different contexts in which these studies were employed, the consequences generally Khati (2011) indicated that students have a favorable attitude regarding their teachers' use of first language in English classes. Nazary (2008) emphasized that students do not prefer to speak in their first language, but they prefer their teacher who can comprehend their first language. Further, he also believed that students can use their first language to ease the learning process of the target language. The results of Saito and Ebsworth study (2004) support those of the present study. They pointed out that students prefer their teacher who can comprehend their first language. Students also believe that teachers who use first language are helpful. In this light, the findings of the questionnaire revealed that the students in the current study have the same opinion.

Conclusion

This paper investigated students' reasons and opinions towards the use of their first language in English classes at Azawiya University. Besides, the research determined the most common reasons for using L1 among students, concentrating also on students' views towards the use of first language in their classes.

A mixed-method approach was used for data collection. 119 students who study English as a foreign language were surveyed to collect the quantitative data, while eight students were interviewed to obtain the qualitative data. For the research questions, the data obtained from the students' opinions towards using the first language. The Questionnaire questions were analyzed into percentages by using Statistical SPSS program. The qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis.

The results of this study showed that EFL students had slightly positive attitudes towards using native language when it aimed at easing foreign language learning for low-level students. The participants indicated that if the native language is overused, it distracts their attention from learning the target language. Thus, it reduces learners' exposure to the target language and increases their reliance on the first language. The results also revealed that the most common reason students' use their first language is to check the meaning of unknown words during English lessons in addition to

understand grammatical points. Furthermore, the results showed that the participants used their native language to create a bridge between their first language linguistic background and the linguistic culture of the target language. In addition, talking about personal things was mentioned as one of the most common reasons for first language use.

Moreover, students who study English as a foreign language at Azawiya University had a positive attitude toward teachers' use of first language in their English classes. Additionally, the participants preferred teachers who communicate in their first language.

The results of this study revealed that students thought that the monolingual approach, which concentrates on foreign language only is not helpful, especially among students with a low-level of proficiency. In contrast, using English-only seemed to be preferred by students with high-level of proficiency. Furthermore, the students' highlighted some learning situations during which using first language might be helpful such as: when trying to comprehend difficult notions, when understanding grammatical rules and when learning new vocabularies. It may also be helpful to increase students' consciousness of the similarities between the linguistic backgrounds of the two languages.

The results of this research support the limited use of the first language to increase students' exposure to the English language. Because bilingual and monolingual approaches do not seem enough; instead, a more balanced approach towards first language is needed which make the most of and recognizes the first language as a helpful classroom tool. Students' use of their first language might be limited because students become more confident in using the target language.

In conclusion, the current study contributes to discussion among English Language Teaching scholars regarding bilingual and monolingual approaches by examining students' views regarding this issue. The results of this study will create a better environment for students which take in consideration the role of using the first language in EFL classrooms.

Pedagogical Implications

The current study has important pedagogical implications for both students and teachers.

The results of this study support the limited use of the first language to make the most of students' exposure to the foreign

language. Because of students' limited linguistic backgrounds in the foreign language, low-level students need the support of their first language to be exposed to the foreign language. So, first languages use helps students in numerous situations.

Furthermore, some researchers as Prodromou (2002) believe that the use of first language has been enhanced for numerous procedures such as checking understanding, clarifying vocabulary, explaining difficult notions, or increasing students' self- confidence. The results of this study propose that students can use their first language to comprehend grammatical points, especially among low-level students and to overwhelm the shortcomings while interacting in the foreign language. Additional, they can use their first language to check the meaning of a notion or a new word during the English class to learn easier and faster. Also, students should expose themselves to the foreign language as much as possible to deal with learning the target language.

The results of this study can improve both students' performance and enthusiasm and teacher professionalism. Classrooms that offer using first language are possibly a better environment for learning the foreign language, consequently, distance between students and their teacher is decreased. When the first language is overly used, students have a tendency to believe that they cannot deal with learning the foreign language. So, students should be exposed to the target language as possible. Newmark (1991) stated that students' first language can be a valuable tool if it is used suitably for teaching English as a second or a foreign language irrespective of the students' proficiency level. In early stages, it can be a beneficial tool in terms of using class time successfully.

Similar to the results of other studies (Satio & Ebsworth, 2004; Huang, 2006; Nazary, 2008; Khati, 2011; Alshammari, 2011), the findings of this study revealed that having a teacher who can accomplish students' needs is essential for improving students' motivation and performance in the class, and providing a better environment classroom.

Consequently, teachers can use the first language while coping with unknown notions and words for better understanding. Furthermore, teachers can apply these results to decrease the amount of using first language in their English classes. Teachers can also better comprehend students' attitudes towards first language use during English classes.

Therefore, the findings of the current study may help teachers in adjusting their English Language Teaching methodologies to improve the students' learning.

In conclusion, the findings of the current study support bilingual and monolingual approaches and do not seem adequate; instead, a more balanced approach towards first language is needed which increases and confesses the first language as a useful classroom tool. Low-level students who dearth foreign language proficiency, their first language may be tolerated. Nevertheless, this use may be finite as students become gradually more self-assured in using the foreign language.

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