

## AN INVESTIGATION OF THE USE OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE IN LIBYAN EFL CLASSROOMS

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to explore the use of first language (Arabic) in the Libyan EFL classrooms as well as teachers' and students' attitudes towards using it. To this end, 5 Libyan EFL teachers and 143 Libyan EFL undergraduate students from the English department of Sebha University took part in the study. Data were gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings of the study indicated that the Libyan EFL students had positive attitudes towards using Arabic in the classroom to some degree; however, they were in favor of using English more than Arabic. It was also found that the students employed Arabic frequently to translate words from English into Arabic. The results also reported that the Libyan EFL teachers used Arabic in their classrooms to accomplish many purposes such as helping students to understand, giving instructions, emphasizing information and giving the meaning of new and unfamiliar words. Additionally, teachers held positive attitudes towards the use of Arabic inside the classroom, but they were of the opinion that Arabic can be only used in certain cases and it should not be overused.

**Keywords:** first language, attitudes, Libyan EFL teachers, Libyan EFL students, Libyan EFL classrooms

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v29i2/155-176>

This article examines the use of the first language by Libyan EFL teachers and students while learning and teaching English in the classrooms. Using learners' first language in a second or a foreign language classroom has been a controversial issue amongst language teachers and researchers. Some teachers believe that the first language can be used in certain conditions. For example, it

can be used to help students understand and learn the second language (Cook, 2013; Tang, 2002), introduce new vocabularies, clarify difficult grammar, and provide instructions as well as suggestions (Mirza, Mahmud & Jabbar, 2012). Cole (1998) argues that the first language is very beneficial for beginners as students at this level have little knowledge of the second language. The use of the first language can also present the main dissimilarities between the first language and the second language, to stimulate students and to decrease their anxiety. Furthermore, Cook (2008) points out that teachers of second or foreign language can use the first language for two major purposes. One is to transfer meaning, i.e., using the first language to express meaning of vocabulary and sentences, and the other purpose is to make the classroom more organized such as managing the classroom and giving instructions for activities. Likewise, Alshammari (2011) and Machaal (2012) state that using first language can save teachers' time in explaining, increase students' comprehension and make the process of learning more efficient. The use of first language with beginners has been proved to be a very beneficial and valuable tool in improving and enhancing students' understanding. Another important reason for using the first language by teachers in the second language classroom is to create a natural relationship between teachers and their students. There is no hindrance between teachers and their students (Turgut & İrgin, 2009), so the communication between teachers and students become easier (Nation, 2003) and students will feel free to ask their teachers. According to Medgyes (2001) "non-native English teachers benefit from their ability to use the students' mother tongue as a powerful teaching and learning tool" (p. 436). This view is supported by Tang (2002) who reported that limited use of the first language in the English classroom does not decrease students' exposure to English, but it simplifies and facilitates the learning and teaching processes. "Far from being an obstacle, for some scholars, learners' first language is a precious resource" (Namaghi & Norouzi 2015, p. 617). It can also encourage students to take part in the group work and do activities and discussions. Jones (2010) reports that "L2 learners experience higher levels of motivation for learning the L2 and develop a greater sense of comfort participating in pair, group, and whole-class discussions and activities" (p. 5). Students who are doing pair and group works need to use their first language from time to time to discuss the topics. Similarly, Holliday (1994) emphasized that "students working in groups or pairs do not have to speak English all the time; they can speak in their mother tongue about a text

and if through this process they are producing hypotheses about the language, then what they are doing is communicative” (cited in Carless 2008, p. 331).

On the other hand, some researchers endorse that the use of the first language in second language classrooms can have a negative influence on students' learning process as it decreases the learners' exposure to the second language and lessens their chances to use the second language (Deller & Rinvulcri, 2002; Polio & Duff, 1994). As stated by Mahadeo (2006) the use of the first language creates obstacles in learning the second language, and it also prevents the student from attaining the valuable participation in the second language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Moreover, researchers of second language acquisition are in favor of exposing students to a lot of L2 and the first language should be avoided in the classrooms (Chambers, 1991; Franklin, 1990; Polio & Duff, 1994; Turnbull, 2001). Those researchers maintain that when language teachers use a lot of first language in the classroom, they can reduce learners' sufficient exposure to the second language input which can have undesirable effects on learning the second language and might delay the process of second language acquisition. Mahmutoğlu and Kicir (2013) point out that “despite the advantages of using L1, it is nonetheless indicated that there are disadvantages of overusing mother tongue in foreign language classrooms. Overusing L1 causes using L2 less. The students feel dependent on their mother tongue.” (p. 55). Furthermore, the use of the first language in second language classes can lead to some problems. Being afraid of too much reliance is one of the dominant problems of first language use (Atkinson, 1987; Cole, 1998). Jan, Li and Lin (2014) point out that for several years experts and educators in the field of second language acquisition have regarded the monolingual method or approach of using English only in foreign language teaching as the right and suitable method to teach English in China. “Teaching methods have long guided this approach by banning learners from using their shared L1 in EFL classroom activities” (Jan, Li & Lin 2014, p. 162). According to Afzal (2013), the monolingual approach proposes that the target language has to be the only medium of instruction. Thus, the prevention of the first language promotes the success and effectiveness of learning the second language.

Though some language teachers and educators are entirely against the use of first language in the classrooms, more and more specialists have started to believe in the facilitating role of the first language in the second and foreign language classroom (Liao, 2006; Kavaliauskienė & Kaminskienė, 2007; Cook, 2010). Some teachers and students view the first language as a helpful and use-

ful method in teaching and learning language in the classrooms. Moreover, the learners have frequently set a tendency to use the first language as a learning tool to accomplish their goals in understanding, remembering and learning their second or foreign language whether their teachers discourage them or not (Karimian & Mohammadi, 2015). Similarly, Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) maintain that the first language can provide students with a cognitive support that make them able to explore language and produce a high-quality work. In support of this, the Greek teachers involved in Copland and Neokleous's (2011) study believed that the use of the first language could save time, offer more effective classroom experience and decrease the amount of stress their students had. Research in the field of the first language use in foreign and second language classrooms indicated that little and judicious use of the first language in the English classrooms can simplify the process of teaching and learning. Teachers must employ first language carefully and cautiously and it should be planned very well to obtain positive outcomes (Cook, 2013).

There has been abundant of research undertaken in the field of first language use in English classrooms by numerous researchers and language teachers. Majority of this research has explored teachers' beliefs regarding the use of the first language in the classroom or how often it is used. On the contrary, there have been only few studies investigating students' attitudes and reasons for using their first language while learning English in the classrooms (Al Sharaeai, 2012). In fact, the students' perceptions towards the use of first language and English have an important role to play in learning English (Vani-chakorn, 2009). A number of studies in different parts of the world have been conducted in this regard (see, e.g. Al-Nofaie, 2010; Blooth, Azman, & Ismail, 2004; Dujmović, 2014; Januleviciene & Kavaliauskiene, 2002; Kim & Petraki, 2009; & Yazdiamirkhiz, 2011; Nazary, 2008; Saito & Ebsworth, 2004). Some indicated the positive perceptions of the students concerning the use of the first language to promote learning in EFL classrooms including to clarify ideas and lexis (Saito & Ebsworth, 2004), to translate new vocabulary, to define notions, to offer some explanations and to aid each other in their groups (Blooth, Azman, & Ismail, 2014). Kim and Petraki (2009) indicated that first language plays a useful role in the classroom, particularly in the early phases. The first language is seen as a facilitating means in the English classroom and is preferred in some situations (Al-Nofaie, 2010; Januleviciene & Kavaliauskiene, 2002). Dujmović (2014) who did a research in the Croatian context even reported that the translation of some lexis, complicated ideas, or even the whole

text was considered the best way to learn a foreign language by the Croatian teachers involved in the study. The teachers emphasized that Croatian can be used to check understanding and to ensure that students have comprehended the text. On the other hand, Mahmoudi's and Yazdiamirkhiz's (2011) study found that Iranian students of both low and high levels emphasized that the English language must control and dominate the classroom interaction and not their first language. Likewise, Nazary's (2008) research showed that most of the Persian language learners who have different proficiency levels did not believe that the use of the first language can be a useful or an efficient method for learning the second language.

Despite the numerous studies that have been conducted to investigate the issue, the use of first language among Libyan EFL teachers and students in English classroom has not received enough attention particularly at university level. More studies need to be done to investigate this topic. The results of the present study are important as they can help both teachers and students to reflect on their perspectives and practices regarding the issue, and consider the role of the first language, in this case, Arabic, in their English classrooms. The current study, therefore, aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the Libyan EFL students' attitudes towards the use of Arabic?
2. What are the reasons for using Arabic by Libyan EFL students in the classroom?
3. Do Libyan EFL teachers use Arabic inside the classroom? Why?
4. What are the teachers' opinions regarding the use of Arabic in the classroom?

## **METHOD**

In order to gain a better understanding of the first language (Arabic) use in Libyan EFL classrooms, the present study deployed a mixed method research design. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied. The quantitative methods were used to collect data about the Libyan EFL students' attitudes towards the use of their first language in EFL classrooms and their reasons for using their first language. The qualitative methods were employed to gather data about Libyan EFL teachers' use of the first language in the classroom as well as their perceptions of using it. The subjects of this study were 143 Libyan EFL students who are studying English as a foreign language at Sebha University. The participants have been learning English between 5 to 15 years and they

were randomly selected from different semesters. The total number of the students at the English department was more than 400, but only 143 students showed more willingness to participate in the study as some other students were absent and some were not available all the time. The 143 students were therefore selected as a sample for the present study. The participants' English proficiency levels were varied. There were 14 males and 129 females aged between 18 to 27 years old. Arabic is used as a mother tongue for these participants. In addition, five teachers participated in this study and they are teaching different English courses at the Department of English of Sebha University. The researcher selected these five teachers because they were available all the time at the college, and they were cooperative and keen to participate in this study. The teachers also speak Arabic as their mother tongue. There were two males and three females who were between 30-52 years old. Each teacher was assigned a code, that is, T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5. With regard to the teachers' experience, it varied from one teacher to another. Most of the teachers had 6 to 11 years teaching experience except for one teacher who has 24 years of teaching experience. All the teachers had a Master degree.

Data collection methods involved questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain information about the use of the first language in the classroom and students' attitudes regarding that. The questionnaire was adapted from Salah (2012) and Jan, Li and Lin (2014). To suit the purpose of the current study, only the items which were related to the current study were included. The Cronbach alpha was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was calculated to be .769 which was found to be reliable and acceptable. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part aims to seek general information about the students such as age and gender. The second part contained 22 items, and it comprised three sections. The first section focused on Libyan EFL students' attitudes towards the use of Arabic and the second section was about students' reasons behind using Arabic in English classroom. As regards the third section, the focus was on the students' attitudes towards their teachers' use of Arabic and reasons for using it. Respondents were asked to select their answers from a four-point Likert-scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "disagree". Additionally, a semi-structured interview was used to elicit in-depth information about the teachers' use of the first language, the reasons behind using it and their attitudes towards using it. The interview encompassed two parts. The first part included demographic information about the teachers such as age, gender,

etc., and the second part consisted of 13 questions relating to the use of the first language and the teachers' attitudes towards it.

With respect to the questionnaire, the researcher got permission from the teachers to conduct the questionnaire. Then, the researcher met the students and talked to them about the goal of her study. Before administering the questionnaires to the participants, clarification of some of the questionnaire items and instructions regarding how to fill in the questionnaire were given by the researcher. Besides, students were permitted to ask any question concerning any of the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants in the class and they took ten minutes to finish it. The questionnaires were returned to the researcher at the same day and the return rate was 100% as the participants filled in the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher. Prior to conducting the interview, the researcher met the teachers and explained the objectives of her study to them. Teachers were informed that the interview would be recorded. Five teachers were involved in doing face-to-face interview and each teacher was interviewed individually. All of the interviewees were willing to participate with confidence and ease, which helped facilitate the process of data collection methods. Each interview sessions took about 15 minutes and they were audio recorded. The audio-recorded interviews were then transcribed to be analyzed by the researcher.

The data of the current study were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 16) to find out frequencies and percentages. The data of the interviews were analyzed qualitatively.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

In the present study, both questionnaires and interviews were used with the intention of providing answers to the four research questions employed in this study. The findings of the first and second research questions are shown in Table 1, which displays Libyan EFL students' attitudes towards the use of Arabic in the classroom.

**Table 1. Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Arabic in the Classroom**

	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1	Using Arabic has a negative influence on students' learning of English.	28.0% (40)	38.5% (55)	8.4% (12)	25.2% (36)
2	Using Arabic makes teaching and learning easier.	15.4% (22)	58.0% (83)	4.9% (7)	21.7% (31)
3	Arabic is essential in the English classrooms.	14.0% (20)	40.6% (58)	16.1% (23)	29.4% (42)
4	Arabic can be used as a method to help students develop their English proficiency.	25.2% (36)	40.6% (58)	11.2% (16)	23.1% (33)
5	Using Arabic in the classroom decreases the opportunities of using English.	16.1% (23)	48.3% (69)	14.0% (20)	21.7% (31)
6	English should be taught monolingually.	27.3% (39)	46.9% (67)	9.8% (14)	16.1% (23)
7	Students should be allowed to use Arabic.	11.9% (17)	37.8% (54)	13.3% (19)	37.1% (53)

As shown in Table 1, the data analysis indicates that Libyan EFL students have positive attitudes towards the use of Arabic in English classroom to some degree; however, most of them are in favor of using English. The highest percentage of agreement goes to the items "English should be taught monolingually" (74.2%). The respondents also deemed that Arabic has a negative impact on learning English (66.5%). Likewise, 64.4% of the respondents agreed that Arabic lessens the opportunity of using English. On the other hand, the participants advocate the use of Arabic to some extent. As can be seen from the data, 73.4% maintained that Arabic can make learning English easier. Besides, 65.8%



agreed that Arabic can be used as a method to help students develop their English proficiency followed by 54.6% who stated that Arabic is very important in English classes. The results also revealed that more than 70 respondents (50.4%) believed that students should be allowed to use Arabic.

**Table 2. Students' Reasons for Using Arabic in English Classroom**

	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1	To translate English words into Arabic.	27.3% (39)	61.5% (88)	2.8% (4)	8.4% (12)
2	To understand grammar rules.	33.6% (48)	48.3% (69)	4.2% (6)	14.0% (20)
3	To carry out small group work.	14.7% (21)	46.9% (67)	7.7% (11)	30.8% (44)
4	To feel less stressed.	14.7% (21)	45.5% (65)	10.5% (15)	29.4% (42)
5	To translate English passages for comprehension.	18.2% (26)	62.2% (89)	7.0% (10)	12.6% (18)
6	To do activities in the classroom.	32.2% (46)	32.9% (47)	9.1% (13)	25.9% (37)
7	To ask questions.	21.0% (30)	37.8% (54)	10.5% (15)	30.8% (44)

Table 2 shows the reasons for using Arabic by Libyan EFL students in English classroom. As seen in the table, a large number of the respondents used Arabic chiefly to translate English words into Arabic (88.8%), to understand grammatical rules (81.9%), to translate English texts for understanding (80.4%) and to do activities in the classroom (65.1%). Other reasons for using Arabic in the class are to carry out group work, to feel less stressed and to ask questions.

**Table 3. Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Use of Arabic and Reasons for Using It**

	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1	Teachers should be allowed to use Arabic.	13.3% (19)	40.6% (58)	12.6% (18)	33.6% (48)
2	Teachers must speak English as much as possible.	50.3% (72)	34.3% (49)	8.4% (12)	7.0% (10)

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
<b>3</b>	Teachers must use Arabic as little as possible.	<b>30.8%</b> <b>(44)</b>	<b>52.4%</b> <b>(75)</b>	<b>7.7%</b> <b>(11)</b>	<b>9.1%</b> <b>(13)</b>
<b>4</b>	My teacher usually uses Arabic to give instructions.	<b>14.7%</b> <b>(21)</b>	<b>62.9%</b> <b>(90)</b>	<b>7.0%</b> <b>(10)</b>	<b>15.4%</b> <b>(22)</b>
<b>5</b>	My teacher usually uses Arabic to translate abstract words.	<b>24.5%</b> <b>(35)</b>	<b>57.3%</b> <b>(82)</b>	<b>7.0%</b> <b>(10)</b>	<b>11.2%</b> <b>(16)</b>
<b>6</b>	My teacher usually uses Arabic to manage the class.	<b>20.3%</b> <b>(29)</b>	<b>41.3%</b> <b>(59)</b>	<b>9.1%</b> <b>(13)</b>	<b>29.4%</b> <b>(42)</b>
<b>7</b>	My teacher usually uses Arabic to motivate students.	<b>18.9%</b> <b>(27)</b>	<b>42.7%</b> <b>(61)</b>	<b>14.0%</b> <b>(20)</b>	<b>24.5%</b> <b>(35)</b>
<b>8</b>	My teacher usually uses Arabic to check students' understanding.	<b>29.4%</b> <b>(42)</b>	<b>49.0%</b> <b>(70)</b>	<b>7.0%</b> <b>(10)</b>	<b>14.7%</b> <b>(21)</b>

Table 3 represents the students' attitudes towards their teachers' use of Arabic and the reasons for using it. According to the data shown in the table, 121 out of the total population agreed that teachers should speak English as much as possible followed by 83.2% who stressed that Arabic has to be used as little as possible by the teacher. In addition, more than half of the participants stated that teachers are permitted to use Arabic in the class. With respect to the reasons for using Arabic by the teachers, most of the respondents indicated that their teachers use Arabic mainly to translate abstract words (81.8%), to check students' comprehension (78.4%) and to give instructions (77.6%) respectively. Accordingly, from the analysis it can be understood that Libyan students held the opinion that teachers must use English most of the time in the class and they should only use little Arabic.

In the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Libyan EFL teachers to answer the third and fourth research questions. In responding to the first question which was "Do you use Arabic in your English classroom? Why?" all of the teachers reported that they use Arabic in their classroom for the following reasons: to make their students understand, to illustrate something, to emphasize information, to give instructions, to explain a new term or a concept, to draw students' attention and to give the meaning of new and unfamiliar words. With respect to the second question which was, "In which situations do you use Arabic in the classroom?" most of the teachers

stated that they use Arabic when they feel that their students do not understand something. Arabic was also used to explain the meaning of some certain words, concepts, new terms and to give examples. When asked how much Arabic should be used in the class, the majority of the teachers indicated that Arabic should not be used a lot in the class because it is an English class and it can be only used when it is needed. Two teachers stated that it depends on the students' level. If they are good, then Arabic should not be used at all, but because of students' low proficiency levels, teacher will have to use Arabic to make things clearer. T5 reported:

It depends. Sometimes, if the students' level is really high, no need to use Arabic at all. If I need to use Arabic, I will use it if students' level does not allow them to pick up everything. Using Arabic would not harm. There should be a balance. The teacher can balance the frequency of using Arabic. It should not be overused at the same time only in case there was a need.

When asked whether they code-switch while explaining something to their students, all the teachers emphasized that they frequently code-switch from English to Arabic in their classes to check their students' understanding. T5 said:

Yes, I do that frequently. Sometimes, to check understanding; I will explain something in English then if I find them questioning, doubting. I can see their facial expressions or if I asked them to clarify or to paraphrase or rephrase what I have explained and I could see that they had problem doing. So, I would use Arabic to just make sure that they got the point.

Concerning the advantages and disadvantages of using Arabic in the English classroom, all the interviewees maintained that the use of Arabic can have many advantages which include making everything clear and easy for the students to understand, making the students more interested in the class, and helping them pay more attention. However, using Arabic all the time, as the teachers stated in the interviews, can become a habit for the students and they will find it more difficult to express themselves in English. Using Arabic will not help students interact with their teacher in the class and they will not be exposed to a lot of English. Regarding the question of when students should be allowed to use Arabic in the class, most of the teachers reported that they can use Arabic when they intend to express their thoughts and opinions in English but they cannot find the equivalent of the Arabic word in English.

When asked about their opinions on the idea that students can speak Arabic outside the classroom but they should speak only English inside the classroom, the vast majority of the teachers agreed that students should speak English inside and outside the classroom because this will help develop and improve their English. T2 stated:

Well, I think they should use English in both situations outside and inside the classroom. Ok, because we motivate them all the time. If you want to improve your language, you should use it outside as much as you use it inside the classroom with your teacher otherwise you will not learn.

With respect to the teachers' opinions about the idea to avoid the use of Arabic and make English the dominant language in the classroom, all the teachers completely agreed that English should be the dominant language in the classroom, but it will be okay if the teachers use some Arabic from time to time to explain something, provided that it is not overused. T2 reported:

Well, of course English should be the dominant one, but as I told you L1 is required from time to time. It is just the degree how much you use it. The teacher should be the one who controls how much L1 we use inside the classroom.

Regarding the question of whether the teachers give the Arabic translation of certain expressions or concepts in English that the students do not understand, all of the interviewees stated that they do not give the translation directly. They try to explain the word in English first, but if their students still do not understand, they translate the word to Arabic. Thus, according to the teachers' responses, giving the Arabic translation is the last resort. T4 stated:

First of all, I try to do my best to translate it in English. I try to explain it in English. If they could not understand or understand the paraphrasing, I will say it in Arabic.

When the teachers were asked whether or not they think the students will lose interest and concentration in what they are learning if the teacher only uses English in the classroom, the teachers' opinions varied. T1 stated that it depends on the teacher's experience and how s/he could make a good atmosphere in the class and sustain the students' interest. T2 said that listening to a lot of English would, in fact, help improve students' skills. Similarly, T3 emphasized that she can keep her students interested by asking them to do different activities and exercises in English. On the other hand, T5 reported that when she

speaks English, her students look overwhelmed and they cannot understand everything and pay attention. In this case, she uses some Arabic words to draw her students' attention then immediately goes back to English.

Concerning whether students feel more motivated, relaxed, confident and less anxious when the teacher uses Arabic in the class, most of the teachers agreed that using Arabic in the class makes their students feel more relaxed because it is their mother tongue. In addition, students seem to feel more comfortable and motivated because they can understand what is said to them. They also pay more attention. On the contrary, T1 and T2 were totally against the use of Arabic as they reported that using Arabic in the class will not motivate their students due to the fact that their students are good and even if the teachers speak English all the time, their students will still feel motivated. Additionally, students will feel that they are not learning a second language. T1 said:

I don't think so. I don't see them motivated while I speak Arabic maybe they understand more, but regarding being more motivated no. Regarding my students this semester, they are actually very good students. So, it is ok even I speak in English the whole time still motivated. So, changing from English to Arabic does not have anything to do with motivation.

T1 also reported that if he uses Arabic in his class, he does not notice that his students feel relaxed because they are in advanced level where they can express themselves in English.

Regarding the question of whether or not there is any relationship between teacher's experience and the use of the first language in the class, almost all of the teachers believed that there is a relationship between teacher's experience and the use of first language as experience is very important in this regard. T1 held the opinion that experienced teachers will know when to use Arabic in appropriate situations. In addition, experience can help teachers keep a balance between the use of Arabic and English.

## **Discussion**

The present study explored the use of the first language (Arabic) in Libyan EFL classroom. The results of the study reported that Libyan EFL teachers held positive attitudes towards Arabic but according to them, Arabic should be used only in a limited way and under certain conditions. The results of this study seem to agree with Laura's (2016) research in which she found that Spanish

teachers hold positive attitudes towards their first language, but it should be only employed in certain situations. The findings of the current study are also in accordance with Rabani's, Bejarzehi's and Ehsanjou's (2014) study which indicated that Persian teachers of English had positive attitudes towards the use of Persian language in teaching English reading texts. Likewise, Hall's and Cooks' study (2013) revealed that generally, teachers agreed that English should be maximized but they also reported that learners' first language can be employed to some extent in the classrooms. Numerous studies reported that judicious use of first language in the English classroom does not decrease students' exposure to English, but can support and aid the processes of teaching and learning (Afzal, 2013; Schweers, 1999).

As opposed to the results of this study, a previous research by Alrabah, Wu and Aldaihani (2016) reported that Kuwaiti teachers of English showed negative attitudes towards the use of Arabic in English classroom. A possible explanation for these two different results is that Libyan EFL teachers believe in the major and facilitating role that Arabic plays in the EFL classroom as it can be used to achieve many purposes. In fact, Arabic can facilitate the teaching and learning process. Thus, it can be used from time to time and it should not be disregarded at all. With respect to Kuwaiti teachers' negative attitudes towards Arabic, it can be understood that these teachers are against the use of the first language as they view it as an obstacle to learning English. As a result, for them, English should only be taught monolingually and Arabic should be totally avoided inside the classroom. As stated by Alrabah, Wu and Aldaihani (2016) the reasons behind this negative attitudes is that if the Kuwaiti teachers use Arabic in their classrooms, they will feel more guilty about the loss of the second language exposure. Besides, they feel that using lot of Arabic in the class is a waste of time.

As regards the reasons for using Arabic in EFL English classroom, the results of this study revealed that the teachers employed Arabic in their classrooms to help their students understand, to give instructions, to emphasize information, to give the meaning of new and unfamiliar words and to explain new concepts. In line with this result, Al-Buraiki's (2008) study showed that teachers chiefly stated that they used the first language in order to give instructions and clarify new concepts and vocabulary. According to some researchers, first language is suitable to be utilized in the EFL classroom by the teachers to give the meaning of an unfamiliar word, to explain abstract words and to clarify hard concepts (Butzkamm, 2003; Meyer, 2008; Cole, 1998; Cook, 2013). A

similar view is held by Schweers (1999) and Meyer (2008) who point out that it is essential for the teachers to use their students' first language so as to make sure that the students understand what is explained to them.

Concerning the students' attitudes towards the use of Arabic in EFL classrooms, the current study revealed that Libyan EFL students exhibited positive attitudes to a certain extent, but most of them mainly support the use of English. The results of this study support Manara's (2007) research which found that a large number of the Indonesian students agreed that English should be used to the fullest. Nevertheless, as much as they prefer to keep the maximum use of English, the first language is still used in a variety of situations in their classroom practice. In a similar vein, a study conducted by Al-Nofaie (2010) revealed that the attitudes of Saudi Arabian students regarding the use of Arabic was generally positive and they liked to use Arabic in some situations and for specific reasons. Contrary to the findings of the present study, Nazary's (2008) findings indicated that the majority of Iranian students had negative attitudes towards their first language and they refused using it. A possible explanation for this negative attitude is that the students want to be exposed to a lot of English and the first language should not be employed. Additionally, in Iran, the majority of Iranian EFL teachers prefer conducting their classes based on a monolingual approach where only the second language is used mainly inside their classrooms (Nazary, 2008). On the other hand, Libyan EFL students prefer to use Arabic to help them learn English in an effective and beneficial way. They consider Arabic as an important tool which cannot be avoided inside the EFL classrooms. According to Mohebbi and Alavi (2014) "first language has the potential to prompt L2 learning and its use should be encouraged; however, it does not mean L1 use should be used comprehensively" (p. 66). Learners' first language needs to be used efficiently and carefully. Second language learners should be encouraged to keep a balance between the first language and the second language use in learning the second language. Though a number of scholars (see, e.g., Cook, 2013; Harbord, 1992; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002) emphasize that first language can be a valuable means in second and foreign language classrooms, they caution that teachers should not heavily depend on it (Wells, 1999). Thus, the suitable and occasional use of first language to achieve certain purposes in second language classroom can facilitate and support the learning process and help students be more competent learners. Silvani (2014) argues that "using English as the target language, assisted by the

appropriate use of first language in certain occasions can support the language learning and enhance students' English mastery" (p. 7).

The current study also found that translating words from English to Arabic was the most common reasons for using Arabic by Libyan EFL students in the class. Students also used Arabic to understand grammar rules, to translate English passages for understanding and to do activities in the class. The results of this study are aligned with Blooth's, Azman's, and Ismail's (2014) study which reported that Yemeni university students used Arabic to translate new words and provide some explanation. Additionally, in agreement with the current study, Afzal's (2013) study found that Iranian students used their first language to understand grammatical points as well as defining some new lexis and translating some words. First language can be used for a variety of reasons: to give instructions particularly for beginners, to make sure that students completely understand what they must do (Atkinson, 1987; Cole, 1998; Machaal, 2012; Tang, 2002), elucidate the meanings of words (Jingxia 2010; Tang 2002), translate from first language to second language when students do not find English words (Nadzrah & Kemboja, 2009) and illustrate complex grammar rules (Tang, 2002).

With regard to Libyan EFL students' attitudes towards their teachers' use of Arabic and their reasons for using it in the classroom, the results of this study showed that the majority of the students believed that the teachers should use English most of the time and as much as possible. In congruent with the findings of this research, Al-Shidhani (2009) found that over 90% of Omani students participating in his study stressed that their teacher should speak English as much as possible. Additionally, the findings of this study showed that students reported that their teacher used Arabic mainly to translate abstract words, to check students' understanding and to give instructions. The results of this study are compatible with Salah's (2012) study which revealed that Palestinian students thought that their teacher use Arabic mostly to translate abstract words and to check students' understanding.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

According to the outcome of this study, it is evident that Libyan EFL students indicated positive attitudes towards the use of Arabic in English classroom; however, they are of the opinion that English should be used more, and Arabic should be used to some degree. Accordingly, Libyan students need to



resort to Arabic where necessary to serve certain purposes so as to learn English more easily. Moreover, Libyan teachers also had positive attitudes regarding the use of Arabic, but they stressed that Arabic must be used only little to accomplish some purposes such as giving instructions and helping the students to understand. It is proposed that first language be used properly to do a variety of roles in the language classroom such as checking for understanding, giving instructions and explaining vocabulary and grammar (Atkinson, 1993; Cook, 2013; De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Libyan teachers and students agreed that English should be the dominant language; however, they have some tendency to use Arabic, and they view it as necessary only in certain cases. Even though Arabic cannot be avoided in the English classroom, Libyan teachers stated that there should be a balance between the use of the first and second languages in the class so that their students will not completely rely on their mother tongue all the time.

All in all, based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that in Libyan teachers' and students' perspectives, using some Arabic in English classroom does not have any negative influence for both teachers and students. Moreover, using learners' first language can be used as a tool to aid the students to learn a foreign language in an effective and useful way. The findings of the study reconfirm that learners' first language should not be ignored by teachers and students due to its major and facilitating role in English classroom. More empirical research with a larger number of participants is required to investigate further the use of first language (Arabic) in the Libyan EFL context. It is recommended that further research focus on the correlation between the use of first language and other factors such as gender, level of English proficiency, teaching experience and individual differences.

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