Evolving Perceptions of L1 Use in Libyan University EFL Classrooms: From Pedagogical Aid to Restriction

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Abstract: *The role of first language (L1) use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has been a longstanding area of debate in language pedagogy. While monolingual immersion models advocate for minimising L1 use to enhance fluency, bilingual education theories highlight its potential as a cognitive and pedagogical scaffold. This study explores how Libyan university EFL instructors' perceptions of L1 use have evolved over time, identifying the factors that have influenced shifts in their attitudes and instructional practices. Using a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with university instructors representing diverse teaching backgrounds and experiences. Thematic analysis revealed a clear transition from an initial acceptance of L1 as a supportive tool to a more cautious and restrictive stance. Concerns about student dependency, institutional expectations, and professional development were found to be key drivers of this shift. However, despite the increasing discouragement of L1, instructors continued to recognise its pedagogical value in specific contexts, particularly for beginner students and when explaining complex grammatical structures. The findings suggest that rigid monolingual policies may not fully align with classroom realities and that a more flexible, research-informed approach could enhance EFL instruction. Implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and institutional policies are discussed, emphasising the need for structured yet adaptable guidelines that allow instructors to use L1 strategically without undermining L2 immersion. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on bilingual education by advocating for a balanced, context-sensitive approach to L1 integration in EFL instruction.*
Keywords: L1 use, EFL instruction, language immersion, bilingual education, teacher perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

The role of Arabic (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction remains a subject of ongoing debate in Libyan universities. Discussions among instructors frequently highlight the

tension between institutional expectations, pedagogical beliefs, and practical classroom realities. While no formal policy explicitly prohibits L1 use, it is generally discouraged, with instructors often expected to maintain an English-only environment. Despite this, Arabic continues to be used discreetly, particularly when it facilitates student comprehension.

Over the past three decades, monolingual instructional models have dominated foreign language pedagogy, reinforcing the belief that full immersion in the target language (L2) fosters optimal language acquisition. However, recent research has re-examined the role of L1, highlighting its potential benefits when used strategically. In the Libyan context, where Arabic is the shared linguistic background of both instructors and students, this debate carries particular significance. The effectiveness of EFL instruction is often assessed by the extent to which instructors minimise L1 use, raising critical questions about how they perceive L1 integration and how these perceptions evolve over time.

This study investigates how Libyan university EFL instructors' attitudes towards L1 use have developed throughout their careers. Through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, it examines the factors shaping these evolving beliefs, exploring whether changes are driven by professional experience, institutional policies, or exposure to research. While extensive literature discusses the advantages and drawbacks of L1 use in EFL instruction, less attention has been given to how instructors' perceptions originate and shift over time. By focusing on instructors' lived experiences, this study provides insights into the shifting pedagogical landscape in Libyan universities, highlighting the challenges and considerations influencing L1 use in EFL instruction.

Background and Context
The role of L1 in EFL instruction has long been debated in applied linguistics and language pedagogy. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) advocates for full L2 immersion, arguing that minimising reliance on L1 enhances language acquisition. This perspective has shaped monolingual instructional models, reinforcing the belief that restricting L1 fosters fluency and communicative competence. In contrast, sociocultural and bilingual education theories challenge this assumption. Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (1979) suggests that proficiency in L1 supports L2 acquisition through cognitive and linguistic transfer, while Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) highlights L1's role as a scaffolding tool that facilitates comprehension and gradual L2 development. These contrasting views have influenced EFL teaching practices, particularly in academic settings where English proficiency is a primary goal.

Despite the dominance of English-only approaches, instructors often employ L1 selectively to support learning, particularly in explaining complex grammar, clarifying abstract concepts, and managing classroom interactions. However, attitudes towards L1 use are not static; they shift over time in response to professional development, institutional policies, and evolving pedagogical perspectives. Some instructors initially adopt a flexible stance towards L1 integration but later

discourage its use, while others uphold strict English-only policies before recognising L1's strategic benefits. Understanding these evolving perceptions is essential for informing teacher training and curriculum design, ensuring that instructional practices align with both pedagogical research and classroom realities.

This study explores how Libyan university EFL instructors' attitudes towards L1 use have changed over time. While previous research has largely focused on whether L1 should be included in EFL instruction, less attention has been given to the factors influencing instructors' evolving beliefs and practices. By investigating how instructors negotiate and refine their approach to L1 use throughout their careers, this research offers insights into the interplay between pedagogical theory, teaching experience, and institutional expectations, contributing to a deeper understanding of L1 integration in EFL instruction.

Research Problem and Rationale
Research on L1 use in EFL instruction has primarily focused on the advantages and disadvantages of monolingual and bilingual teaching approaches (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007; Harmer, 2007). However, relatively little attention has been given to how instructors develop, modify, and refine their perceptions of L1 use over time. The debate has centred on whether L1 should be used in the classroom rather than examining how instructors' perspectives shift in response to experience, institutional expectations, and pedagogical training. This gap in research limits understanding of how instructors adapt their beliefs and teaching strategies throughout their careers.

This issue is particularly relevant in Libyan higher education, where English-only instruction is widely promoted, yet classroom realities often necessitate some L1 use. Instructors may begin their careers supporting bilingual teaching methods but later discourage L1 due to concerns about student dependency and fluency development. Conversely, others may initially favour English-only approaches but later acknowledge L1's benefits in specific contexts. Without a clearer understanding of the factors shaping these changes, teacher training programmes may fail to prepare educators for the complexities of multilingual classroom instruction.

Furthermore, the extent to which instructors' shifting perspectives are influenced by personal teaching experiences, professional development, research exposure, or institutional pressures remains unclear. Some educators may reduce L1 use based on personal pedagogical convictions, while others may feel compelled to align with institutional policies favouring English-only instruction. Investigating these influences is essential for designing professional development initiatives that equip instructors with informed, flexible strategies for L1 integration in their classrooms.

By examining the changing perspectives of Libyan university EFL instructors, this study contributes to the broader discourse on bilingual education. It moves beyond rigid theoretical

debates to provide evidence-based insights into how instructors navigate L1 use in response to real classroom challenges. The findings aim to inform teacher training, curriculum development, and institutional policy, ensuring that pedagogical approaches reflect classroom realities rather than abstract theoretical assumptions.

Research Objectives

This study investigates how Libyan university EFL instructors' perceptions of L1 use have evolved throughout their teaching careers. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Examine how instructors' perspectives on L1 use have changed over time, identifying key moments and experiences that have shaped their beliefs.
2. Identify the factors influencing these evolving perceptions, including teaching experiences, institutional expectations, professional development, and exposure to linguistic research.
3. Explore whether instructors' changing attitudes align with broader trends in language pedagogy, such as the shift towards communicative language teaching, bilingual education, or monolingual immersion models.

Rather than engaging in the binary debate over whether L1 should or should not be used, this study focuses on how instructors actively negotiate and adapt their pedagogical practices over time. By addressing these objectives, it seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of L1 in EFL instruction, offering insights that inform teacher training, curriculum development, and institutional policies.

Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study explores the following research questions:

1. How have Libyan university EFL instructors' perceptions of L1 use changed over time?
2. What factors have influenced the shift towards encouraging/discouraging L1 use?
3. To what extent do instructors continue to perceive value in L1 use despite changes in their perspectives?

These questions seek to uncover the motivations and experiences shaping instructors' beliefs about L1 integration, offering insights into the intersection of pedagogical frameworks, practical classroom realities, and institutional policies. By highlighting the evolving nature of these perceptions, this study aims to enhance understanding of how EFL instructors navigate the complexities of language teaching. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to ongoing discussions in language pedagogy, with implications for teacher education, curriculum design, and institutional approaches to language instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines theoretical perspectives on first language (L1) use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, the historical evolution of language teaching approaches, and

empirical studies on EFL instructors' attitudes towards L1 integration. The focus is on how Libyan university instructors develop and modify their perceptions of L1 use over time, with particular attention given to research exploring shifts in pedagogical beliefs and the impact of institutional influences.

Theoretical Perspectives on L1 Use in EFL Teaching

The debate on L1 use in EFL instruction is shaped by contrasting theoretical perspectives. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) advocates for full immersion in the target language (L2), arguing that reliance on L1 hinders acquisition by reducing exposure to comprehensible input. According to this model, greater engagement with L2 without falling back on the native language enhances fluency. This perspective has significantly influenced English-only policies, shaping instructors' perceptions of L1 as an obstacle rather than a resource.

In contrast, Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (1979) suggests that proficiency in L1 positively influences L2 development through cognitive and linguistic transfer. His Common Underlying Proficiency Model posits that skills acquired in one language support learning in another, particularly in academic contexts. This theory provides the basis for arguments in favour of strategic L1 use to enhance comprehension without undermining immersion.

A sociocultural perspective is provided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which highlights the mediating role of L1 in learning. Vygotsky posits that L1 functions as a scaffolding tool, enabling students to process new information effectively before transitioning to independent L2 use. This theory aligns with studies such as Swain and Lapkin (2000) and Tang (2002), which demonstrate that selective L1 use can lower anxiety, increase engagement, and support comprehension, particularly in beginner-level classrooms. While Krashen's model has historically reinforced English-only policies, the perspectives of Cummins (1979, 2007) and Vygotsky (1978) offer alternative views, validating the evolving perceptions of instructors who integrate L1 strategically based on classroom realities.

Evolution of Language Teaching Approaches

The development of language teaching methodologies has played a crucial role in shaping instructors' beliefs about L1 use. The Grammar-Translation Method, dominant in the 19th and early 20th centuries, relied heavily on L1 for explaining grammatical rules and translating texts. However, this approach was gradually replaced by the Direct Method and later Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), both of which emphasised L2 immersion. CLT, in particular, gained prominence in the late 20th century, reinforcing English-only instruction as the ideal for developing communicative competence.

Learner-centred approaches further reinforced the preference for minimising L1 use, encouraging autonomy in L2 interaction. However, as researchers questioned strict monolingual approaches,

bilingual pedagogy re-emerged as a consideration. Turnbull (2001) argues that while maximising L2 exposure is beneficial, the complete exclusion of L1 is not always necessary, as strategic L1 use can facilitate learning without hindering L2 acquisition. Similarly, García and Wei (2014) advocate for translanguaging, the practice of fluidly using multiple languages to support learning, which challenges the notion that L1 should be entirely excluded. These evolving perspectives suggest that while instructors' perceptions of L1 use are influenced by the methodologies they were trained in, exposure to alternative approaches can lead to shifts in their teaching beliefs over time.

Empirical Studies on EFL Instructors' Attitudes Towards L1 Use
Empirical research presents a complex picture of EFL instructors' attitudes towards L1 use. Studies supporting L1 integration highlight its role in enhancing comprehension, maintaining student engagement, and reducing affective barriers to learning. Cook (2001) argues that L1 can function as a cognitive support mechanism, particularly when explaining abstract concepts, providing instructions, or engaging in contrastive analysis. Cummins (2007) further emphasises L1's role in lowering the affective filter, creating a more inclusive learning environment, and improving student retention of L2 concepts.

Conversely, research advocating English-only instruction underscores the importance of maximising L2 exposure to develop fluency. Harmer (2007) warns against excessive L1 use, arguing that it fosters student dependency and reduces opportunities for authentic L2 practice. Similarly, Mansor (2017) found that frequent L1 use in Libyan higher education classrooms negatively impacted students' confidence in speaking English, reinforcing the argument that instructors should limit L1 use despite its potential benefits.

Studies within the Libyan context provide further insights into how instructors navigate L1 use and how their perceptions shift over time. Alsied (2018) examined EFL instructors at Sebha University, finding that while an English-only approach was initially preferred, practical classroom challenges led instructors to integrate Arabic selectively for efficiency. El Daibani (2024) investigated high school ESL teachers in Libya, reporting that despite policies discouraging L1 use, most relied on Arabic for grammar explanations and classroom management. Elmangoush (2023) explored how professional development influenced instructors' perceptions, revealing that exposure to new pedagogical frameworks led some teachers to reconsider their stance, incorporating L1 more strategically over time.

Summary and Research Gap
The literature suggests that EFL instructors' attitudes towards L1 use are shaped by theoretical orientations, historical teaching methodologies, and empirical research. While traditional monolingual models discourage L1 integration, alternative perspectives highlight its strategic role in L2 acquisition. Research in Libya and globally indicates that instructors' perceptions are

dynamic, evolving in response to experience, institutional policies, and engagement with pedagogical research.

This study builds on these insights by exploring how Libyan university instructors' beliefs about L1 use develop over time, shedding light on the complexity of pedagogical decision-making in EFL instruction. By focusing on the evolving perspectives of instructors, this study aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering a clearer understanding of how EFL educators negotiate L1 use in response to classroom challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine how Libyan university EFL instructors' perceptions of L1 (Arabic) use in the classroom have evolved over time. The methodology is structured to capture shifts in their beliefs, shaped by pedagogical experiences, institutional policies, and professional development. The following sections outline the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, and analytical framework used to interpret the findings.

Research Design
A qualitative research design was selected to explore the complexities of instructors' changing perceptions of L1 use. Since beliefs and attitudes develop over time and are influenced by various contextual factors, semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection method. This approach enables an in-depth investigation of instructors' perspectives at different stages of their careers, allowing for a detailed understanding of the factors shaping their pedagogical decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews provides participants with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, discuss the rationale behind their classroom practices, and elaborate on how institutional or professional influences have contributed to their evolving views on L1 integration.

Participants and Sampling
Purposive sampling was used to recruit university-level EFL instructors with diverse teaching experiences. Selection criteria focused on instructors who had taught at Libyan universities for varying durations, providing insight into whether and how their views on L1 use had changed over time. The sample included instructors who initially supported L1 integration but later discouraged its use, as well as those whose perspectives had remained consistent. This range of experiences allows for a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing shifts in pedagogical beliefs.
Six university instructors participated in the study, representing three institutions in western Libya: Sabratha University, the University of Zawiya, and the University of Tripoli. Participants varied in academic backgrounds and teaching experience, ranging from early-career educators with fewer than five years of experience to veteran instructors with over two decades in the field. Including

instructors from multiple institutions and varying levels of expertise enhances the credibility of the study by incorporating a broad spectrum of viewpoints on L1 use in EFL classrooms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, selecting participants from different universities minimises the risk of institutional bias, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how pedagogical beliefs about L1 use develop across different academic settings (Dörnyei, 2007). This approach aligns with established qualitative research practices, ensuring that findings reflect a range of teaching philosophies and institutional influences rather than being limited to a single educational context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Data Collection
Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary method of data collection, with four taking place in person and two via online platforms, depending on participant availability. The interview questions were designed to elicit insights into instructors' initial perspectives on L1 use, the factors that contributed to shifts in their perceptions, and their current stance on L1 integration in the EFL classroom. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their teaching experiences, institutional expectations, and any exposure to theoretical frameworks or professional development programmes that may have influenced their beliefs. To uphold ethical integrity, participants were provided with detailed information about the study's objectives and methodology before giving their consent to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, with responses coded to prevent identification. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without providing justification. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), creating an environment where instructors could share their perspectives openly and without reservation.

Data Analysis
Thematic analysis, following the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyse the interview data. This method facilitated a structured exploration of patterns and themes within the qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how instructors' perceptions of L1 use have evolved. The analysis followed six key stages to ensure rigour and depth.

First, familiarisation with the data was achieved by transcribing and repeatedly reviewing interview responses, enabling the identification of initial patterns and key points. Second, initial coding involved identifying concepts related to changing perceptions, teaching experiences, and institutional influences, focusing on recurring ideas such as evolving attitudes toward L1 use, the impact of institutional policies, and the role of professional development in shaping instructional practices.

In the next stage, codes were grouped into broader thematic categories, including "initial support for L1," "institutional pressures," and "adaptation through experience." These themes were then

reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data, consolidating overlapping ideas while preserving the depth of participants' experiences. The subsequent stage involved defining and naming themes to clearly capture the evolution of instructors' beliefs and the underlying factors driving those changes. Finally, the process of producing the final report involved integrating these themes into the Findings and Discussion sections, ensuring coherence and a well-supported interpretation of the data.

The coding process was conducted manually to ensure that themes emerged organically from the data rather than being predetermined. Special attention was given to themes related to belief evolution, pedagogical experiences, institutional expectations, and professional development, as these elements provide key insights into the factors shaping instructors' perspectives on L1 use over time. This methodological approach ensures that the study captures the complexity of instructors' evolving perceptions of L1 in EFL instruction. By utilising semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the research presents a detailed, contextually rich account of the factors influencing language instructors' beliefs and practices. The findings contribute to broader discussions on bilingual pedagogy, professional development in EFL instruction, and the ongoing debate regarding the role of L1 in second language learning, offering practical implications for policymakers, educators, and language teaching institutions.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The qualitative analysis provides insights into how Libyan university EFL instructors' perceptions of L1 use have evolved over time. Through thematic analysis, key patterns emerged, illustrating an initial perception of L1 as a supportive tool, followed by a gradual shift towards discouraging its use. This change is influenced by various pedagogical, institutional, and experiential factors, shaping instructors' approaches to language instruction in their classrooms.

General Use of Arabic
The responses reveal contrasting perspectives on the use of Arabic in the EFL classroom, reflecting varying instructional philosophies. While some instructors acknowledge its strategic benefits, others advocate for an English-only approach. Noah adopts a practical stance, stating, *"Yes, occasionally,"* indicating that Arabic is incorporated when needed to aid comprehension or classroom management. Amal, Adam, and Jory express similar views, affirming, *"Yes, sometimes," "Sometimes,"* and *"Yes,"* respectively, suggesting that although English is prioritised, Arabic plays a supportive role in specific situations. This suggests that rather than seeing L1 use as a hindrance, these instructors view it as a resource that can facilitate student understanding when used judiciously.

Conversely, an English-only approach is firmly upheld by some instructors, who believe that minimising Arabic enhances L2 acquisition. Sarah rejects the use of Arabic outright, stating, *"No,"*

emphasising her belief that maximising L2 exposure is crucial for effective language learning. Tarek shares a similar perspective but concedes that exceptional circumstances may necessitate Arabic, explaining, *"No, I never use it unless it's inevitable."* These contrasting perspectives illustrate the ongoing debate among instructors about the role of Arabic in EFL instruction, reflecting a tension between the pedagogical goal of fostering L2 immersion and the practical need to address comprehension challenges.

While these views differ, they highlight the complexity of L1 use in EFL classrooms. Those who integrate Arabic in a limited capacity acknowledge its role in aiding comprehension, while those who strictly avoid it argue that L2 immersion is necessary for fluency development. The variation in responses suggests that instructors navigate this issue based on their teaching philosophies, institutional expectations, and classroom experiences.

Influence of Teacher Training on Perceptions of L1 Use
The responses reveal that instructors' initial perspectives on L1 use in L2 instruction were shaped by their training, which varied between strict English-only methodologies and more flexible bilingual approaches. Tarek and Sarah were explicitly taught that L1 should not be used in L2 instruction. Tarek, in particular, views L1 as detrimental, stating, *"The use of L1 in teaching L2 has a negative influence on the learning process as it causes interference and consequently hinders the learning process."* Adam reinforces this perspective, explaining that his training encouraged him to *"avoid the use of L1 in the classroom,"* aligning with immersion-based methodologies that discourage reliance on L1 to promote fluency. These perspectives reflect the dominant belief in monolingual approaches, which advocate for maximum L2 exposure as essential for language acquisition.

In contrast, other instructors were exposed to bilingual teaching methodologies that acknowledged the potential benefits of L1 use. Amal recalls learning about the Grammar Translation Method but critiques its effectiveness, stating, *"Some teachers applied it. However, it's probably neither quite convenient nor effective."* While this suggests that her training incorporated L1-inclusive strategies, she does not find them conducive to communicative competence. Noah presents a more balanced perspective, indicating that his training acknowledged both advantages and limitations of L1 use, stating, *"That it can be useful in certain situations."* Jory takes an even stronger stance in favour of bilingual strategies, asserting, *"L1 has many advantages paralleled to L2,"* demonstrating an appreciation for the role of L1 in language learning.
These responses highlight the extent to which training influences instructors' beliefs. Those trained under strict monolingual frameworks tend to discourage L1 use, whereas those introduced to bilingual approaches view it as a valuable pedagogical tool when applied strategically. The differences in training backgrounds contribute to the diverse ways instructors implement or restrict L1 use in their teaching, suggesting that pedagogical beliefs are shaped not only by initial training but also by ongoing professional development and classroom experiences.

Changing Perceptions of L1 Use in EFL Classrooms

The analysis reveals a shift in instructors' perspectives on L1 use, transitioning from initial acceptance in the early stages of their careers to a more restrictive stance over time. At the beginning of their teaching journeys, Arabic was often viewed as a valuable instructional tool, particularly for beginner-level students struggling with comprehension. Jory underscores this perspective, stating, *"L1 is really important when students are just starting out. It should be used in a limited way, mainly to get them thinking and to clarify things when needed."* Similarly, Adam highlights its role in foundational levels, explaining, *"I'd definitely say it's helpful when you're teaching low-level classes, especially with first-year students since they don't have a strong grasp of English yet. Speaking only in English feels like building castles in the air—you're mostly talking to yourself and end up answering your own questions."* These views align with research on L1 as a scaffolding tool in early-stage language learning, where selective use of the native language supports comprehension before transitioning to full L2 immersion (Cummins, 2007; Cook, 2001). Over time, instructors' attitudes shifted towards discouraging L1 use, often due to concerns about student dependency. Noah reflects on this transition, explaining, *"I'm not in favour of relying too much on L1, but I think teachers can use it as a point of reference when explaining L2, especially when students struggle with complex concepts. Sometimes, a quick explanation in their native language can clarify things faster and help them stay engaged, but it shouldn't become a fallback that limits their exposure to English."* Amal expresses a similar viewpoint, acknowledging the necessity of L1 in certain cases, stating, *"Sometimes I need to explain English terms in Arabic as well when I feel that students get confused or they do not reach the point exactly."*

Concerns over student dependency played a crucial role in shaping this shift. Adam notes, *"If students get used to using Arabic, they'll keep falling back on it instead of pushing themselves to use English. Like, if they know they can always switch to Arabic, why struggle to find the right words in English?"* Similarly, Sarah warns against excessive reliance on L1, arguing, *"If a teacher constantly switches to Arabic while teaching English, students won't really pay attention when English is being spoken. Instead, they'll just wait for the Arabic explanation, which takes away the opportunity for them to actively engage with the language."*

For some instructors, this shift towards minimising L1 use resulted in a firm commitment to an English-only approach. Sarah, for example, asserts, *"I just can't see myself using Arabic when teaching English to English major students. It goes against my teaching philosophy."* Tarek also supports a strict English-only approach, stating, *"No, I never use it unless it's inevitable,"* suggesting that L1 use should be avoided except in extreme cases where comprehension is completely obstructed.

While the overall trend suggests a move away from L1 use, some instructors continue to navigate its role pragmatically. Jory acknowledges the tension between institutional expectations and

practical classroom realities, stating, *"I do use it, but I don't openly talk about it. If I mention it to my colleagues, it's seen as a weakness in my English and teaching methods. But honestly, I don't think using it is anything to be ashamed of."* This suggests that despite the broader pedagogical shift towards L2 immersion, individual instructors continue to negotiate the role of L1 based on their classroom realities.

These responses illustrate the complexity of L1 integration in EFL instruction. Initial acceptance of Arabic was often motivated by the need to support students' learning, while later experiences led to a more cautious approach, emphasising L2 immersion as a key factor in language acquisition. However, even among those who advocate for reducing L1 use, there is recognition that a rigid English-only model may not always be practical. The findings suggest that pedagogical beliefs about L1 are not fixed but evolve based on a combination of teaching experience, institutional expectations, and classroom challenges.

Factors Influencing the Shift Towards Discouraging L1 Use
As instructors gained experience, their views on L1 use evolved, with a tendency to minimise its presence in the classroom due to concerns over student dependency and fluency development. Participants who were initially more flexible towards Arabic use became more cautious, fearing that students might over-rely on their native language instead of developing confidence in English. Amal, who initially recognised the usefulness of Arabic in facilitating comprehension, later questioned its long-term impact, stating, *"At first, I thought using Arabic would make things easier for students, but then I noticed that whenever I allowed it, they stopped trying to express themselves in English."*

Similarly, Tarek, whose training discouraged L1 use, described how experience reinforced his belief that reliance on Arabic hinders student progress: *"I've seen students who get too comfortable with Arabic explanations. Instead of making an effort to understand English, they just wait for the translation. This does more harm than good in the long run."* His perspective reflects the concern that L1 use, rather than acting as a support mechanism, can become a crutch that limits students' engagement with L2.

Institutional expectations also played a role in shifting attitudes. While some instructors initially felt comfortable integrating L1 strategically, professional development workshops and administrative policies promoting an English-only environment gradually influenced their classroom practices. Noah reflected on this change, stating, *"There was a time when I didn't mind explaining difficult terms in Arabic, but after attending training sessions that emphasised immersion, I started reducing it. Now, I think twice before switching to Arabic because I know the university expects us to maximise English exposure."*

Jory, who was trained in a more flexible bilingual approach, also experienced pressure to align with institutional expectations. She expressed frustration over the stigma surrounding L1 use, explaining, *"I know L1 can be useful, but every time I use it, I feel like I have to justify it. There's this idea that if you're a good English teacher, you should be able to explain everything without Arabic."* This illustrates how institutional norms not only influence teaching practices but also shape instructors' perceptions of their own professional competence.

These responses suggest that while initial training shaped instructors' early beliefs about L1 use, long-term classroom experiences and institutional pressures contributed significantly to shifts towards minimising its role. Instructors who noticed increasing student dependency on Arabic began prioritising English immersion, while exposure to CLT methodologies and administrative expectations reinforced the idea that reducing L1 use leads to better language acquisition. However, as Jory's experience highlights, even instructors who recognise the pedagogical value of L1 may feel compelled to limit its use due to prevailing institutional attitudes that equate English-only instruction with effective teaching.

Persistent Recognition of L1's Value
Despite the gradual shift towards discouraging L1 use, instructors did not entirely dismiss its pedagogical benefits. While English immersion remains the primary goal, responses indicate that Arabic continues to be seen as a valuable instructional tool when used strategically. L1 is particularly recognised as an effective means of clarifying complex grammatical structures and abstract vocabulary. Adam emphasises this point, explaining, *"Sometimes, the best way to explain abstract words or tricky grammar rules is by using Arabic. It helps get the point across, especially when English explanations just don't seem to click for the students."*

For beginner students, L1 is seen as a necessary bridge that facilitates their transition into L2 learning. Amal, reflecting on her experience with lower-level learners, states, *"You can't just ignore it completely, especially since they're still struggling to express themselves properly in English. At the end of the day, it's their mother tongue, and sometimes they need it to bridge the gap."* Her response underscores the role of L1 in building initial linguistic confidence and easing students into the complexities of English instruction.

Although certain instructors acknowledge the benefits of L1, caution is still exercised to ensure that students do not become overly reliant on Arabic. Tarek, for instance, insists on pushing students to engage with English, arguing, *"Let them wrestle with the meaning and work it out for themselves. If we keep handing it to them in L1, it takes away the challenge and won't help them truly learn and retain the language."* His perspective reflects concerns that excessive L1 use may limit students' cognitive engagement with L2, preventing them from developing essential problem-solving skills in English.

Additionally, some instructors noted that L1 can serve non-linguistic purposes, such as fostering rapport and reducing anxiety, particularly among students who feel intimidated by English. Jory highlights this aspect, explaining, *"Sometimes, a brief explanation in Arabic reassures students that they're on the right track. If they're completely lost, they disengage, and that's worse than using a little L1 to guide them."* Her view aligns with research suggesting that selective L1 use can lower the affective filter, making students more receptive to language learning.

The findings illustrate a clear shift in instructors' perceptions of L1 use, moving from initial acceptance to a more cautious, controlled approach. Concerns over student dependency, institutional expectations, and evolving pedagogical beliefs have contributed to this transition. However, rather than outright rejecting L1, instructors advocate for a balanced methodology that prioritises English immersion while allowing for targeted L1 support when necessary. This evolution highlights the dynamic nature of teaching beliefs and the importance of teacher training programmes that equip instructors with strategies to integrate L1 effectively without compromising L2 development.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how Libyan university EFL instructors' perceptions of L1 use have evolved over time. The shifting attitudes towards Arabic in the classroom highlight the ongoing tension between monolingual and bilingual approaches to EFL instruction. While initially perceived as a supportive tool for comprehension and engagement, L1 use has increasingly been discouraged due to concerns about student dependency, fluency development, and institutional expectations. However, despite this shift, instructors continue to recognise its pedagogical value in specific contexts, such as clarifying complex grammatical structures and assisting beginner students. These findings both align with and challenge existing theoretical models and empirical research on L1 use in EFL classrooms.

Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Frameworks
The evolving perspectives on L1 use among instructors reflect broader theoretical debates on bilingual pedagogy. Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which prioritises comprehensible input as the key to second language acquisition, supports minimising L1 use to maximise exposure to English. A commonly expressed concern among participants was that excessive reliance on Arabic limits opportunities for fluency development. This belief was articulated by Sarah, who remarked, *"If a teacher constantly switches to Arabic while teaching English, students won't really pay attention when English is being spoken. Instead, they'll just wait for the Arabic explanation, which takes away the opportunity for them to actively engage with the language."* This perspective aligns with Harmer (2007) and Mansor (2017), who highlight the benefits of maximising L2 exposure to improve fluency and communicative competence.

However, Krashen's model does not fully address how L1 can serve as a cognitive and affective scaffold in language learning. The findings also support Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which emphasises L1 as a mediating tool that facilitates comprehension, particularly for lower-level learners. Several instructors acknowledged the necessity of L1 at the early stages of learning. Judy, for instance, asserted, *"L1 is really important when students are just starting out. It should be used in a limited way, mainly to get them thinking and to clarify things when needed."* Similarly, Adam described an English-only approach as ineffective for beginners, explaining, *"Speaking only in English feels like building castles in the air—you're mostly talking to yourself and end up answering your own questions."* These views align with Swain and Lapkin (2000) and Tang (2002), who found that selective L1 use can reduce student anxiety, enhance engagement, and aid comprehension, particularly in beginner-level classrooms.

Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (1979) is also relevant to the study's findings. This theory posits that proficiency in L1 supports L2 acquisition through cognitive and linguistic transfer. Although discouraging Arabic use was widely observed among instructors, the necessity of L1 as a bridge between students' prior linguistic knowledge and new English concepts was also recognised. Amal highlighted this point, stating, *"You can't just ignore it completely, especially since they're still struggling to express themselves properly in English. At the end of the day, it's their mother tongue, and sometimes they need it to bridge the gap."* This perspective aligns with Cummins' argument that strategic L1 use can facilitate, rather than hinder, L2 development.

Institutional expectations and professional development have also played a significant role in shaping instructors' perspectives on L1 use. Those trained under English-only policies were more likely to discourage Arabic use, whereas those exposed to bilingual methodologies demonstrated greater flexibility. Judy, for example, noted that L1 use is often perceived negatively among colleagues, stating, *"I do use it, but I don't openly talk about it. If I mention it to my colleagues, it's seen as a weakness in my English and teaching methods. But honestly, I don't think using it is anything to be ashamed of."* This suggests that while immersion models continue to dominate institutional discourse, instructors often develop their own strategies for L1 integration based on classroom realities.

Overall, the findings reinforce the idea that instructors' beliefs about L1 use are not static but evolve over time in response to experience, training, and institutional pressures. While a preference for English immersion remains dominant, the continued strategic use of L1 in certain instructional contexts suggests that a rigid, monolingual approach may not fully align with the realities of EFL instruction in Libya.

Practical Implications for EFL Teaching

The findings of this study hold significant implications for EFL instruction, particularly in settings where students share a common L1. While Arabic use in the classroom is increasingly discouraged,

its strategic value remains acknowledged when applied in a controlled and purposeful manner. This suggests that rigid English-only policies may not always align with the realities of language instruction, particularly for beginner learners who may require occasional L1 support to facilitate comprehension and engagement.

A key implication is the need for clear institutional policies that provide guidance on the appropriate use of Arabic in EFL classrooms. The absence of such policies has resulted in inconsistencies in instructors' approaches, feeling pressured to avoid Arabic entirely, even when its use could be beneficial. Jory highlighted this issue, stating, *"I do use it, but I don't openly talk about it. If I mention it to my colleagues, it's seen as a weakness in my English and teaching methods. But honestly, I don't think using it is anything to be ashamed of."* This suggests that institutional discourse on L1 use remains heavily influenced by the English-only ideology, creating an environment where instructors may feel constrained in their pedagogical choices. A more open discussion on the role of L1 in language learning is needed to ensure that instructors feel supported in making informed decisions about when and how to incorporate Arabic in their teaching.

Additionally, teacher training programmes should focus on how L1 can be integrated strategically rather than eliminated entirely. Several instructors who discouraged Arabic use cited institutional expectations and professional development as key factors shaping their beliefs. However, engagement with bilingual education research, such as the work of Cook (2001) and Cummins (2007), has influenced instructors to adopt a more nuanced approach to L1 use. Adam, for instance, who initially adhered to an English-only methodology, reconsidered his stance after exposure to new research, stating, *"Yeah, now I think L1 can be useful in teaching L2, as long as it's used in moderation. I came to this realisation after reading about different learning strategies in some research papers."* This highlights the role of ongoing professional development in broadening instructors' pedagogical perspectives and equipping them with the skills to integrate L1 effectively without compromising L2 immersion.

A more flexible, research-informed approach to L1 use in EFL classrooms could enhance instructional effectiveness while addressing both institutional expectations and student needs. Training programmes should equip instructors with the knowledge to use Arabic in a way that supports comprehension while maintaining a strong emphasis on English exposure. Furthermore, institutions should foster an environment where L1 use is not viewed as a pedagogical weakness but rather as a strategic tool that can be applied judiciously to facilitate learning, particularly in beginner-level instruction. By promoting informed decision-making regarding L1 integration, EFL programmes can better support both instructors and students in achieving optimal language learning outcomes.

Implications for Curriculum Development and Institutional Policies

The findings indicate that universities could benefit from adopting a more flexible bilingual strategy that accommodates the practical realities of the classroom while still prioritising English immersion. While maximising L2 exposure remains a fundamental goal, occasional use of L1 has been acknowledged as a useful tool for facilitating comprehension and engagement, particularly for lower-level learners. Adam's analogy, *"Speaking only in English feels like building castles in the air—you're mostly talking to yourself and end up answering your own questions,"* encapsulates the frustration experienced when students lack the foundational English skills to follow complex explanations. This suggests that a rigid English-only approach may not always be the most effective way to support students' language development.

The study also highlights the importance of curriculum development that takes into account the linguistic realities of learners. Strict English-only policies may be unrealistic in contexts where students have limited proficiency and struggle to engage with complex academic concepts in L2. Instead, structured guidance on the selective use of L1 may enhance learning without undermining English immersion. For instance, instructional materials might incorporate bilingual glossaries for key vocabulary, enabling students to make direct connections between L1 and L2. Additionally, contrastive grammar exercises that explicitly highlight differences between Arabic and English structures could provide a deeper understanding of linguistic patterns, reinforcing L2 learning through meaningful comparisons.

Institutional policies may also benefit from supporting instructors' autonomy in making pedagogical decisions regarding L1 use. While some instructors firmly advocate for a strict English-only approach, others perceive Arabic as a valuable tool for facilitating comprehension and reducing student anxiety. Rather than imposing uniform monolingual policies, institutions could create space for more context-sensitive approaches that align with both theoretical insights and the realities of classroom teaching. Encouraging instructors to reflect on their own experiences and engage with research on bilingual education may enable them to make informed decisions about when and how L1 can be used without compromising L2 immersion.

The discussion of these findings suggests that while instructors often move towards discouraging L1 use over time, their evolving perspectives reflect broader debates in second language acquisition research. The tension between monolingual immersion models (Krashen, 1985; Harmer, 2007) and bilingual education theories (Cummins, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978) is evident in shifting attitudes. Instead of adopting a rigid stance on L1 use, EFL instruction in Libyan universities may benefit from a more context-driven, balanced approach that recognises the strategic role of Arabic in supporting comprehension while maintaining English as the primary medium of communication.

By integrating insights from sociocultural, cognitive, and bilingual education theories, universities may be able to develop more inclusive and effective pedagogical strategies that address the needs of both students and instructors. Future research could continue to explore the intersection of teacher beliefs, institutional policies, and classroom practices, ensuring that L1 use in EFL instruction is informed by both theoretical perspectives and practical considerations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has examined how Libyan university EFL instructors' perceptions of L1 use have evolved throughout their teaching careers. The findings reveal a distinct shift from an initial acceptance of Arabic as a pedagogical aid to a more cautious and often restrictive stance. While L1 was initially regarded as an essential tool, particularly for beginner students, instructors' perspectives changed due to concerns about student dependency, fluency development, and institutional expectations. The belief that excessive reliance on Arabic limits students' exposure to English, thereby hindering their proficiency, has played a significant role in shaping these evolving attitudes. Furthermore, institutional policies and teacher training programmes that emphasise L2 immersion have reinforced the preference for an English-only approach. However, despite the general trend of discouraging L1 use, its pedagogical value continues to be recognised, particularly in contexts where it aids comprehension, facilitates the teaching of complex grammar, and provides cultural and cognitive support to learners. These findings suggest that rigid monolingual policies may not always align with classroom realities, and a flexible, research-informed approach that integrates L1 selectively could enhance EFL instruction.

Pedagogical Recommendations
To maximise the benefits of L1 while maintaining an English-immersive learning environment, a structured pedagogical approach is necessary. Rather than prohibiting L1 entirely, instructors could adopt a principled strategy where its use serves specific instructional purposes. When applied selectively, Arabic may facilitate the explanation of abstract grammatical concepts, clarify difficult vocabulary, and provide linguistic and cultural comparisons that enhance students' comprehension. Teacher training programmes could play a key role in equipping educators with the skills needed to integrate L1 effectively. Training initiatives may include bilingual teaching strategies, contrastive analysis techniques, and scaffolding approaches that prioritise L2 exposure while allowing for L1 use when necessary to support comprehension.

Institutional policies may also benefit from adopting a more flexible stance on L1 use. While immersive English instruction remains the primary objective, controlled and purposeful L1 use has been shown to support student learning, particularly at lower proficiency levels. Instead of enforcing rigid English-only policies, universities could develop guidelines that provide instructors with the autonomy to make informed decisions regarding L1 use based on their students' needs and proficiency levels. Furthermore, communicative competence should be

prioritised through interactive and immersive teaching methods—such as task-based learning and group discussions—that encourage students to express themselves in English while progressively reducing their reliance on L1.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into Libyan university instructors' perceptions of L1 use in EFL classrooms, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study focuses exclusively on instructors' perspectives, without incorporating students' views. Understanding students' experiences and attitudes towards L1 use could provide a more comprehensive perspective on its role in language learning. Secondly, the research is confined to a specific Libyan university context, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other educational settings, such as private universities, secondary schools, or international institutions.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews presents potential limitations related to subjectivity, as participants may consciously or unconsciously frame their responses in ways that align with institutional expectations or personal beliefs. Future studies could incorporate classroom observations to validate instructor accounts and provide a more objective assessment of L1 use in practice. By triangulating different data sources, a more well-rounded understanding of how L1 is used in real teaching contexts can be obtained.

Directions for Future Research

To expand on these findings, future research could explore students' perspectives on L1 use in EFL instruction, as their experiences and preferences play a crucial role in shaping effective pedagogical strategies. Longitudinal studies may also provide insights into how instructors' beliefs evolve over time, particularly in response to professional development, institutional policies, and classroom challenges.

Comparative studies across different educational contexts, including private institutions and language centres, as well as across Arabic-speaking countries, could help determine whether similar trends exist beyond the Libyan context. Additionally, experimental research could investigate the impact of varying levels of L1 integration on student learning outcomes, offering empirical evidence to guide bilingual pedagogical strategies. Examining the relationship between L1 use and specific language skills, such as speaking fluency, reading comprehension, and writing proficiency, could further refine instructional approaches in EFL classrooms.

Final Thoughts

This study highlights the dynamic nature of teacher beliefs regarding L1 use in EFL instruction, demonstrating that perceptions are shaped by both theoretical paradigms and practical classroom realities. While the prevailing trend has been to minimise L1 use, the continued recognition of its strategic value suggests that a rigid English-only approach may not always be the most effective.

A balanced methodology that acknowledges the benefits of selective L1 use while maintaining L2 immersion may better support both student comprehension and language acquisition.

By advocating for a research-informed, context-sensitive approach, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on bilingual education and underscores the need for institutional policies that empower instructors to make informed pedagogical decisions. Ultimately, fostering a more nuanced understanding of L1's role in EFL instruction has the potential to enhance teaching practices, ensuring that language education in Libyan universities remains responsive to the needs of both students and educators.

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