

# استعمال اللغة العربية في حصص تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في عُمان: أسباب الاستخدام وطرائق الحد منها

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**الملخص**  
إن استعمال اللغة الأم في فصول تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية أمر شائع بين المعلمين والطلبة العُمانيين. ولا شك أن تكرار استعمال اللغة الأم قد يحرم الطلبة من الانفتاح على اللغة الإنجليزية ويقلل من فرص ممارستهم لها. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى الكشف عن الأسباب التي تدعو معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية إلى استعمال اللغة الأم بدلاً من اللغة الإنجليزية في الفصول الدراسية للحلقة الثانية بمدارس التعليم العام بسلطنة عُمان، وتحديد طرق واستراتيجيات التقليل منها. تعتمد الدراسة المنهج النوعي في جمع البيانات وتحليلها ممثلاً في المقابلة والملاحظة الصفية. وشملت عينة الدراسة (8) معلمين عُمانيين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في ثلاث مدارس حكومية بمحافظة مسقط. وتوصلت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن استعمال اللغة الأم في فصول تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية شائع ويحدث لأسباب متعددة يرى المعلمون أنه لا توجد بدائل لها. كما كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن هناك طرائق مختلفة يمكن للمعلم العُماني اتباعها للتقليل من الاعتماد على اللغة الأم في أثناء تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية. من هذا المنطلق، قد تسهم الدراسة الحالية في رفع وعي معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الحكومية بسلطنة عُمان بالطرائق التي يمكن بها التقليل من استعمال اللغة العربية في فصول تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية، مع التأكيد على ضرورة إجراء دراسات مشابهة في هذا المجال تشمل عينات أوسع من المدارس والمعلمين.

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## The use of language one in the classes of English as a foreign language in Oman: reasons for the use and ways to minimize it

### Abstract

The use of L1 in Omani EFL classes is a common practice among teachers and students. This occurrence of L1 can be a barrier that hinders students' exposure to English and their chance to practice it. The current study aims at exploring the reasons behind the use of L1 by EFL teachers in Omani cycle two EFL classrooms and identify ways to minimize its use. The study adapts a qualitative research design whereby data is collected via one-on-one semi structured interviews and classroom observations. Eight Omani EFL teachers from three public schools in Muscat Governorate participated in this study. The data was analyzed using the thematic analysis method. The findings showed that teachers use L1 on EFL classrooms in different occasions for different reasons. The findings also revealed that there are different ways to minimize the use of L1 in various classroom situations and activities. Hence, the implication of the findings of this study can help in maximizing the use of English and minimizing the use of L1.

**Keywords:** teaching English as a foreign language, language one, general education, Arabic.

## Introduction

This study focuses on the use of the first language (L1) in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes by (EFL) teachers in Oman. The study aims at exploring why Omani EFL teachers use L1 and identify ways to minimize its use in EFL classes. In Oman, English is taught as a foreign language in the public schools and English is the medium of instructions in the majority of higher education institutions and a critical requirement for employment in various jobs. The majority of teachers and students in Omani public schools share the same mother tongue which is Arabic. The method of teaching English that is adopted by Omani Ministry of Education is the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA) (Al-Ghafri, Mirza and Gabarre, 2019). CLTA advocates the maximum use of target language (TL) and promotes its use whenever possible in different classroom situations looking at TL as a vehicle for communication and not just an object for study (Galali & Cinkara, 2017).

Students' exposure to English in Oman is almost limited to EFL classes because English is considered a foreign language in the country and not a means of communication in everyday social life outside classrooms. Therefore, learners of English may have limited opportunities to experience the real use of English except in EFL classes. Al-Mahrooqi (2012 p.266) confirms that "English is only a school subject. It does not exist beyond the classroom". Similarly, Al-Mahrooqi, Denman and Al-Maamari (2016 p. 64) assert that "there is little opportunity for learners to engage in English outside of the classroom in Oman". Keeping this in mind, English in Omani EFL classes should be used as much as possible. Unfortunately, the use of L1 in Omani EFL classes is a common practice among teachers and students. According to Al-Mahrooqi (2012 p. 265) "teachers use Arabic when teaching English. In fact, some teach English in Arabic". Al-Issa and AlBulushi (2012) confirm in a study which covered 141 students who graduated from public schools in Oman that the use of Arabic is a common practice in Omani EFL classes. They mention that the teachers use Arabic when explaining English vocabulary and grammar rules. Moreover, Al-Ghafri, Mirza and Gabarre (2019) find in a study which covered three Omani cycle two EFL teachers that 28% of the teachers' discourse is in L1. The study addresses this problem by seeking answers for the following three research questions:

1. What is the teachers' perception towards the use of L1 in Omani cycle two EFL classes?
2. Why and when do teachers use L1 in Omani Cycle two EFL classes?
3. What are the possible ways to minimize L1 use by Omani cycle two EFL teachers in EFL classes? The objectives of the study are as follow:

-To find out teachers' perceptions towards the use of L1 in Omani cycle two EFL classes

-To explore when and why teachers use L1 in Omani cycle two EFL classes.

- To find out ways to minimize the use of L1 by Omani Cycle two EFL teachers in EFL classes.

The study employs a qualitative research design to explore Omani EFL teachers' perceptions towards the reasons behind the use of L1 in Omani EFL classes and the methods that need to be followed to minimize the use of L1 in such classes. According to Chivanga & Monyai (2021 p.13) "qualitative research methodology is a subjective and descriptive means of discerning in-depth meanings of events, occurrences, or phenomena from the perceptions of participants". The study adapts observations and interviews as main research tools for data collection. Eight EFL classrooms are observed and the actual practices regarding the use of L1 are noted down using an observation sheet that is designed for this purpose. The second tool is interviews, in which eight EFL teachers responded to open-ended questions regarding their perceptions towards the use of L1 and suggestions for minimizing its use in EFL classes.

## Review of Literature

Available literature contains two different views regarding the use of L1 in EFL settings; one of them is against the use of L1 in EFL settings while the second is pro and supportive of using L1 in teaching TL. This review of the literature highlights both points of views. A number of researchers believe that the use of L1 in EFL classrooms is a negative factor in the learning process. It is argued that the use of L1 deprives learners from valuable time which should be spent practicing English. There are researchers who call for maximizing the learners' exposure to English in EFL classes by excluding L1 use. For instance, Auerbach (1993) states that in English classrooms, the students should be exposed to English to the fullest extent possible as the more students that are exposed to English, the more quickly they learn it. Auerbach added that when students are surrounded with English, they will begin to think in English. Similarly, Shabir (2017) asserts that the L1 should not be used in EFL classrooms as it reduces students' exposure to English and stops students from thinking in English. Moreover, Ellis (1994) points out that teachers should use English for the different purposes in EFL classrooms asserting that the medium as well as the object of instruction have to be in English. He believes that English has to be the exclusive language in EFL classrooms. This is parallel with the view of Phillipson (1992) who asserts that English is best taught monolingually and the more English is used, the better it is for successful learning. Al Balushi (2020 p.69) agrees with the idea of maximum exposure to TL stating that "a lot of exposure to English can lead to higher proficiency among students".

A further argument against the use of L1 stems from the believe that L1 interferes with English. Dulay Burt & Krashen

(1982) define interference as the transfer of the surface structure of the L1 onto the surface structure of the TL. In other words, language learners use the structure of L1 in the TL. This argument is strongly supported by Alshehri (2017 p.21) stating that "various language systems cause negative transfers and impede L2 acquisition". In the same view, Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011 p.67) mention that in Audio Lingual Method the use of L1 is restricted because it is believed that "the native language and the target language have separate linguistic systems. They should be kept apart so that the students' native language interferes as little as possible with the students' attempts to acquire the target language". Harbord (1992) argues that the use of L1 makes students believe that word for word translation is a suitable technique to learn English. This encourages a false belief that there is a word-for-word equivalence between L1 and TL. This is assured by Heng (2011) who stresses that translation alone is not a sufficient strategy for students to grasp the exact meaning of the words and be able to use the words orally and/or in a written form.

On the contrary, there is a significant amount of literature that supports the use of L1 and considers L1 as a facilitator factor in the process of learning TL. Atkinson (1993) states that L1 presents benefits for a lot of learners of foreign languages as the learning strategies that learners adopt for learning are associated with the L1. Similarly, Cook (2001) believes that including L1 in the existing methods of teaching second and foreign language will improve the learning process. Algazo (2020) finds that Jordanian teachers use L1 to overcome learning challenges and motivate students. Moreover, he finds that it is better for the teachers and students to use L1 in explaining difficult concepts or ideas and giving instructions as it saves time and effort. In the same view, Medgyes (2001) believes that EFL teachers who share the same L1 with students have a special privilege which helps them facilitate the learning process. Anh (2010) argues that the use of L1 is advantageous in specific situations such as explaining vocabulary, clarifying instructions and building relationships with learners. Similarly, Alshehri (2017) adds that the use of L1 can reduce language anxiety and increase confidence among learners. Liu & Zeng (2015) find that it is necessary and beneficial to use L1 in EFL classes as learners feel secured and satisfied when L1 is used. It is added that misunderstanding between teachers and learners can be avoided through the use of L1. By the same token, Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) believe that in communicative language learning approach the L1 is used to enhance students' security as it provides a way for students of low level in TL to express their feelings. Similarly, Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) assert that the use of L1 eases classroom management especially if the teachers and students share the same L1. In the same view, Atkinson (1993 p.13) finds that "for many learners (in particular adults and teenagers), occasional use of the L1 gives them the opportunity to show that they are intelligent, sophisticated people". The use of

translation in teaching foreign language can be a useful tool in the teaching process. According to Senel (2010), one language should be taught in connection with the mother tongue of students as translation can ease foreign language acquisition.

### Data analysis

It was mentioned in the introduction that eight classroom observations and semi structured interviews with eight EFL teachers were applied to gather data for answering the three research questions. This section presents data analysis regarding teachers' perceptions of using Arabic in the EFL classroom; the actual use of Arabic in different classroom activities and situations and teachers' ideas for minimizing L1 in the classroom. The Arabic phrases and sentences that were used by teachers and students during classroom observations were noted down. Quotes from the classroom observations and the interviewees are put between [...] below.

Teachers' perceptions towards using L1 in EFL classes  
Data ascertain that the participants are in favour of a restricted use of L1 in EFL classes. They believe that excessive use of L1 negatively affects the learning process. They support the idea of keeping the use of L1 limited and restricted. According to T3, [the excessive use of L1 deprive students from adequate exposure to English]. Similarly, T2 stated that [little Arabic is helpful but more than 20% of teachers' speech in Arabic has negative effects]. In the same view, T1 stated that [the use of L1 negatively affects the learning process as it encourages students to think that English is difficult]. By the same token, T4 believes that [the overuse of Arabic in EFL classes is a challenge that affects the learning process negatively]. Moreover, T5 confirmed the negativity of the overuse of L1 and added that [it confuses students as they are going to use both languages interchangeably].

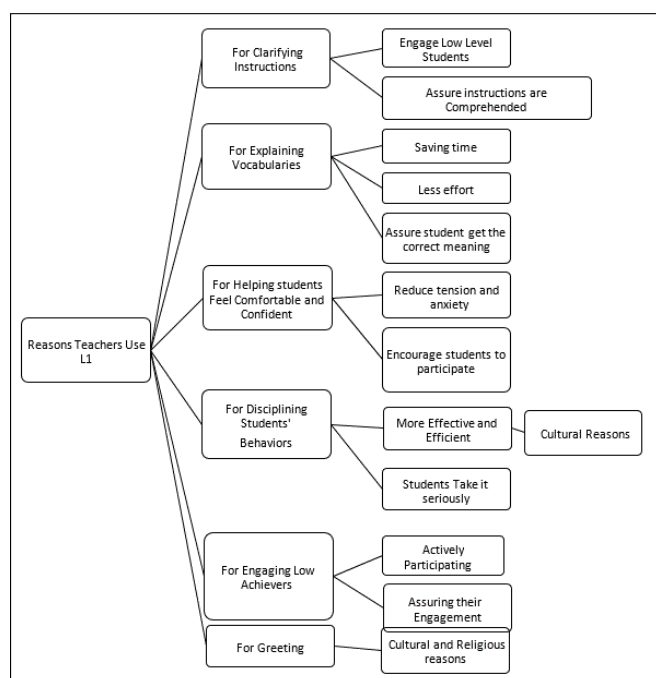
The participants also reported that they use L1 on some specific and limited occasions where it is necessary. According to T1, [I use Arabic very little, on some occasions]. He added that his use of Arabic does not exceed 5%. Similarly, T2 mentioned that [teachers should use English as much as possible in EFL classes], however, he added that [there are situations, such as explaining and clarifying unclear words or phrases to weak students, in which teachers have to use Arabic]. In the same view, T3 mentioned that he prefers to use English in his EFL classes, and he encourages his students to use English. However, he added that [the low level of students in English forces him to use Arabic sometimes especially in teaching vocabulary, grammar and giving instructions]. He stated that [the full avoidance of Arabic is unrealistic]. T6 mentioned that he uses Arabic in almost every EFL class he teaches. He justified that by saying that [sometimes information is delivered more successfully when Arabic is used]. However, he assured that [Arabic should be the second option and English should be the first

one]. T7 stated that [it is impossible to avoid the use of Arabic completely in EFL classes]. He mentioned that this view is based on students' levels in English and the fact that English is a foreign language in Oman. He added that [the use of Arabic has both advantages and disadvantages]. In terms of advantages, he mentioned that [it helps with difficult activities and lessons]. In terms of disadvantages he stated, [it hinders students' acquisition of the language and takes more time because they are not using English as much as they are supposed to].

#### Reasons teachers use L1 in EFL classes

The data which was gathered from classroom observations show that the observed EFL teachers use Arabic for several reasons in different classroom activities and situations i.e. to clarify instructions, explain new words, discipline students, engage low level students and for greetings. Figure 1 below gives a mind map illustration of the reasons behind the use of L1. Detailed analysis of the data is presented below.

**Figure 1: reasons L1 is used in the observed classrooms.**



#### 1. Clarifying instructions

The first reason to use Arabic was to clarify instructions. Six teachers used Arabic to give instructions in the observed classrooms. All of them used English but some of them followed that with Arabic explanations. The frequency of the use of Arabic in giving instructions differed. Only two teachers used English as the only language to give instructions. For instance, T1 asked a student to read the instruction of an activity in English. After that, he explained in Arabic what was said in English. The student read: [match the words in the box to the pictures]. When the student finished, the teacher repeated the instructions in Arabic. T2 instructed the students to rearrange the setting of the classroom, saying to them in Arabic: [we have to change the

arrangement of the class because we will work in groups, each group should have 6 students). He also used Arabic to clarify what is required in an activity, saying: [each answer should not exceed 4 words]. T3, T7 and T8 gave instructions in Arabic, each one time. T3 used Arabic to explain that students have to correct mistakes in an activity.

Data collected by the semi-structured interviews points out that the teachers justified their use of Arabic when giving and clarifying instructions for two main reasons: 1- to engage low level students, 2- to make sure that the students comprehend the instructions. T3 mentioned that Arabic is important to engage the low-level students in the various tasks and activities. However, students' levels in English make it difficult for them to comprehend the instructions in English, thus, the use of Arabic is a necessity. He stated that: [one of the main cases where I think Arabic should be used is to explain the task because students learn by doing. So, if they do not know what to do in the learning task how can they learn? So, we may try to avoid using Arabic in some instances for example, to explain some words we can use acting, drawing and using pictures but explaining a task, explaining what students have to do in a task, in a book, I think, sometimes it requires the use of Arabic].

In this respect, T4 mentioned that the use of Arabic should be limited to some specific situations. He added that [clarifying instructions is a situation in which Arabic should be used as it is necessary for the students, especially low achievers, to know what they have to do in the different activities]. This is consistent with Alshehri (2017) who highlights that the use of L1 in clarifying instructions is necessary to engage the low achievers. T6 asserted that [the information is delivered more successfully and effectively when Arabic is used. He added that [I personally translate the instructions into Arabic after uttering them in English to assure that all students understand what is said].

#### 2. Explaining new words

Data from classroom observation and teachers' interviews prove that using Arabic to explain new words was a common practice. Only one out of the eight observed teachers did not use Arabic to explain the new words. The frequency of explaining words in Arabic or using Arabic equivalences differed from one teacher to another among the other seven teachers. The highest number was 5 times by T4 and the lowest was 2 by T2, 3, 7 & 8. Table 1 below contains the frequency each teacher used Arabic in the observed classes and the English words i.e. nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs, that were explained in Arabic. An example of using Arabic to explain meaning of an English word is from T3 class who tried to explain the word (vehicle) by defining it as [a thing we use to move from one place to another]. When some students said [car] the teacher explained [not exactly but yes it includes cars, buses, and trucks]. The students could not get the meaning; then, the teacher used the Arabic equivalent (Markabah).

**Table 1: the frequency each teacher used Arabic in the observed classes and the words that were explained in Arabic.**

Teachers	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Times	3	2	2	5	0	3	2	2
Arabic is used	Holiday	When	Fast	Cheetah		Herbs	Cultural shock multi-lingual	Opinion
Words that are explained in Arabic	Climbing Scariest	City	Vehicle	Giraffe Tallest Fastest slow		Roseberry Corpse		Useful

As shown in figure 1 above, there are three key justifications expressed by the participants to use Arabic in explaining new vocabulary: time saving, less effort and engagement of weak students. For instance, T1 mentioned that [there are many ways to explain new words to the students but sometimes to save time has to use Arabic]. Moreover, he added that [there are vocabularies that are difficult to be explained in English. Furthermore, T7 mentioned that: [The main issue is when explaining new vocabularies, is that some vocabularies are easier to explain using pictures, putting them in examples and putting them in context but sometimes, especially when dealing with abstract definition and abstract words, students do not get the meanings. Therefore, the teacher has no choice but to use Arabic to assure that students get the correct meanings]. By the same token T8, stated that [the duration of the English sessions which is 40 minutes in normal days and in 35 minutes in Ramadan, the current month, is very short. It is not practical to use different strategies to assure the avoidance of Arabic with every new vocabulary as it takes time and requires effort from both teachers and students as teachers have to prepare for different techniques and students have to understand the right meaning of the word].

### 3. Help students feel comfortable and confident

Data revealed that the EFL teachers use Arabic to help students feel comfortable and confident. T3 used Arabic to say phrases such as: [mistakes are expected, don't worry], [you will not learn unless you make mistake] and [this is a chance to try] in order to reduce students' tension and anxiety to answer the raised questions. T4 used Arabic to motivate students who were reluctant to participate, by saying in Arabic [the students who actively participate, will get gifts at the end of the semester]. To encourage a student who was struggling in saying a sentence in English, T6 said in Arabic: [do not worry, I will help you with any difficult word].

### 4. Disciplining students

Data collected from classroom observations show that Arabic and English were used to discipline students. However, Arabic was used more than English. For instance, T1 used Arabic to ask students to be quiet, he used only one word which is [sound] to ask them to stop small talks. On an occasion, a student was trying to look at the answers of another student, T3 asked him in Arabic to not look and to return to his place. A student in T4 class stood up and talked

to a classmate, the teacher asked him in Arabic to be quiet and to sit down. T5 asked in English some students to be quiet but the students did not respond effectively. When he used Arabic, they stopped talking and paid attention to him. T6 used Arabic to warn students that he will extract their grades if they do not pay attention.

In the semi structured interviews, the teachers justified their use of Arabic in disciplining students by saying that Arabic is more effective due to some cultural reasons. T5 stated that [I think the use of Arabic is a necessity in disciplining students' behaviours because students respond directly after the use of Arabic. Even with good students when Arabic is used, they respond, let's say, more effectively. I think it is something related to the culture]. T6 mentioned that some students consider disciplining in English as a joke. They do not take it seriously like when Arabic is used. By the same token, T7 mentioned that [I use Arabic when students misbehave in different classroom situations as the use of Arabic is efficient in such occasions].

### 5. Engaging low achievers

Three teachers mentioned that they use Arabic to help the low-level students become more active and participate in the classroom. T3 stated that [the majority of the students in the EFL classes are low achievers and in order to engage them I use Arabic. Using English only would deprive these students from actively participating in the class]. A similar view was confirmed by T6 who mentioned that [there are students who are not able to write their names in English and the use of English only does not work with them]. T8 believed that [dealing with students who are poor in English should be in English and Arabic in a way that assure their engagement in the tasks].

### 6. Greetings

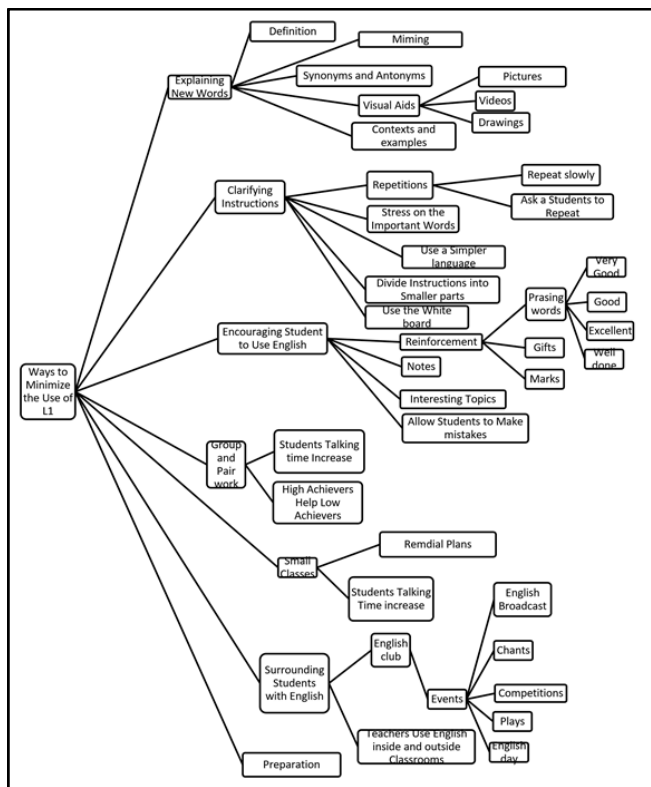
Data revealed that one of the reasons for using Arabic is greeting the students. In seven out of eight classrooms that were observed, the teachers used the Arabic phrase of greeting [Alsalmu Alykum]. The students respond also in Arabic [wa alykum alsalam]. One teacher only did not use this phrase to greet, actually he did not greet the students at all. T1, T3 and T4 followed the Arabic phrase of greeting by saying in English: [good morning] and [how are you?]. The students responded in English [good morning teacher] and [we are fine how are you teacher]. In the semi-structured interviews, in response to a question about the reason behind the use of this Arabic phrase of greeting, T5 and T7 mentioned that they use this phrase for cultural and religious reasons. T5 stated that [I use this phrase to instill in the students our values and to teach them to respect their religion and be proud of it]. T7 stated that [this phrase becomes universal as Muslims of different countries and nationalities use this phrase. It is not limited to the speakers of Arabic].

### • Ways to minimize the use of L1

In this part, the data collected through the observations and the interviews are analyzed to answer the third RQ. The classroom observations demonstrate that there were cases in

which some teachers used Arabic in classroom delivery and other teachers used English only. The interviewed teachers provided some ideas regarding the ways that can be followed to minimize the use of L1 in EFL classes. Figure 2 below illustrates the ways and techniques to minimize the use of L1 in the EFL classes.

Figure 2: ways to minimize the use of L1



### 1. Techniques for explaining new words

The participating EFL teachers used and/or suggested a number of techniques to explain new words without the use of L1- as shown in Figure 2 above. T1 used miming in explaining new words. He explained that [miming is a way in which you try to deliver something with your body and face expressions]. In his class, he explained the meaning of (climb) through miming by pretending using his hands to climb up. T2 recommended to use acting and giving synonyms and antonyms to explain meanings of new words. He stated that [some words are easy to explain through these techniques. For instance, some students might not be familiar with the word (ugly) but if you give them its antonym (beautiful) which is a familiar word, the majority of them will understand the meaning]. T3 and T4 suggested to use drawings and pictures to explain the meaning of the words. T3 clarified that [the drawing technique might not work with all words but, it works for many words]. He supposed [that drawing a building, house, road and many other words on the whiteboard take few seconds and students understand the meanings straightforwardly]. Similarly, to avoid the use of Arabic, T7 proposed to put the sentences in examples and contexts. He stated that [some vocabularies are easier to be explained using pictures, putting them in examples and contexts but you have to put them in sentences that match the level of students].

### 2. Techniques for clarifying instructions

The data provided a number of ways and techniques used or suggested by the participants to maximize the use of English when giving instructions. T1 suggested the repetition of the instructions for more than one time. He explained that [repetition should be slow as there might be students who might not hear the instructions]. Moreover, he suggested stressing on the important words as a technique to help students understand teacher's instructions. He stated that [stressing on important words is similar to the written activities that teachers give to students in which the important words of the instructions are typed in bold and italic fonts to hint that they are important]. T2 and T3 recommended to repeat the instructions using simpler language. T2 mentioned that [the teacher can divide the instructions into parts and make sure that the students understand each part before moving to the next part]. T3 suggested [to ask a student who understood the instructions to explain what he understood to other students as he could have simpler words which are closer to students' language]. T5 mentioned that he sometimes uses the whiteboard to clarify some instructions. For example, to explain the meaning of (underline the mistake) he wrote a sentence on the whiteboard and underlined the mistake. He also suggested to use the gestures and the body language while uttering the instructions to facilitate students understanding of the instructions.

### 3. Techniques for encouraging students to use English

The participating teachers used in the observed classes and recommended in the interviews different ways to encourage students to use English rather than Arabic in the English class. T1 mentioned that he encourages his students to use English through telling them not to worry about making mistakes. He added that another way to encourage students to use English is through responding to them in English whenever they ask the teacher in Arabic. He added [replying in Arabic makes students reluctant to use English]. T5 explained that [if a student talks to me in Arabic I respond in English because that makes my students to respond in English or at least to try to use it]. T2 stated that [when the teachers speak in English the students will be motivated to use it].

T2 added that [praising students with expressions such as good, very good, well done and excellent, when they use English in class is a way of motivating them keep speaking in English in the lesson]. T3 suggested [using topics that students are interested in to motivate them to use English]. He assured that [when I talk about famous football teams and videogames, the students try their best to talk and share their ideas with their classmates]. T5 recommended reinforcement as a way to encourage students to use English, explaining that [besides using the praising words, the students should be reinforced by giving them marks, rewards and gifts and even clapping for them when they use English can make difference]. T6 suggested to encourage low achievers through

appointing them with the simple and easy tasks. T7 suggested [providing students with simple notes that include words with their meanings or pictures and simple definitions that match with their levels, and the sentences that students commonly use in classrooms to encourage them to use English in different classroom situations].

#### 4. Group work and pair work

Two out of the eight observed teachers used group work and pair work in teaching English. The students in the other six classes worked individually which decreased students' interaction and talking time as there is no one they can talk to apart from the teacher. In these six classes, the students barely talked to each other. They were mainly talking to the teachers. In the semi-structured interviews, T8 asserts that [group work can increase students' interactions and talking time in English]. However, he mentioned that [students may shift to Arabic when the teachers are not around. Therefore, teachers should restrict the use of Arabic]. Similarly, T7 suggested that [group work and pair work can be a good way to increase the use of English in the classroom. In pair work one of the students can ask and answer questions. In group work, teachers have to distribute the good students to all groups so they can help their groupmate of lower levels to use English]. He added that [they may help them with vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar].

#### 5. Small classes

The average number of the students in the observed classes was 32 students- the highest number was 34 students, and the lowest number was 29 students. Table 2 below includes the number of students in each of eight observed classes. T2 asserts that [the exposure of students to English in small classes is higher than in the big classes. When teachers have a small number of students in a classroom, they will be able to make sure that every student understands what is happening in the class without the use of Arabic. In the same view, T4 mentioned that [the small classes allow teachers to know what each student needs in order to improve his language. In small classes the teacher can prepare plans to improve the levels of students in English]. T6 mentioned that he is teaching four classes and in each class, there are 32 to 34 students with a total number of 130 students. He mentioned that he only has time to teach the books and do not have time for extra activities to enhance students' levels. He stated that [the time allocated for students to practice English is very limited and having small number of students in such classes would increase their practice of English which definitely can enhance their language].

**Table 2: number of the students in the observed classes.**

Classes	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8
Number of students	31	32	29	33	34	32	32	32

#### 6. Surrounding students with English

The interviewed teachers suggested to surround students with English as a way to minimize the use of L1 in the English class. T1 suggested to activate English clubs in the schools. He stated that [an English club should be responsible for the English events and activities outside the classrooms. There should be an English broadcast in which the students present their talents in English. there should be an English day in which the English club prepare activities and events such as plays, chants and competitions for the students]. T3 stated that [in public schools, students study English only in English classes unlike the private and international schools where English is not limited to English classes as the students of such schools study subjects such as maths and sciences in English. Such high exposure to English raises students' proficiency in English]. T5 stated that [teachers have to use English as much as possible in the classrooms and outside classrooms because this is going to make your students to be more familiar to English and through time you will not need to use Arabic].

#### 7. Preparation

The preparation for the English lesson was suggested as a workable technique for minimizing the use of L1 in English class. T8 mentioned that [preparation is one of the most effective ways to avoid the use of Arabic. When the teachers prepare a lesson very well, they are going to prepare how to present the difficult words to the students in English and give the instructions in a simple language]. Moreover, he added that [the students also should prepare their lessons through reading the instructions and translating the new words]. T7 suggested that [teachers should exchange each other's preparations to be familiarized with the ways and techniques that they do not know].

#### . Discussion

What are the teachers' perceptions towards the use of L1 in Omani cycle two EFL classes?

The majority of participants mentioned that they use Arabic in their EFL classes. However, they opposed the excessive use of Arabic believing that it might negatively affect the process of acquiring the target language. This goes in line with Shabir (2017) findings which assert that teachers believe that the extensive use of L1 negatively affects students' performance. The participants also supported the idea of keeping the use of L1 limited and restricted and that teachers should use English as much as possible in EFL classes. However, they think that there are certain situations in which teachers have to use Arabic, asserting that [little Arabic is helpful]. In Oman the Ministry of Education adopts CLTA in teaching English (Al-Ghafri, Mirza & Gabarre, 2019). CLTA advocates judicious and restricted use of L1 in EFL teaching as asserted by Hadley (2001 p.117) "judicious use of the native language is acceptable where feasible".

The findings further showed that the full avoidance of L1 is unrealistic in the observed ELT classes. The participants i.e. T3 and T7, think that it is impossible to avoid the use of Arabic completely in EFL classes. This matches with Kohi and Lakshmi (2020) assertion that teachers believe that L1 use in EFL classes is inevitable. They added that teachers prefer to use the L1 for the purpose of motivating learners and enhancing relationships with them and in informal discussion inside and outside classrooms.

Why and when do teachers use L1 in Omani Cycle two EFL classes?

The use of L1 in the observed classes was obvious. This matches with Al-Ghafri, Mirza and Gabarre (2019) findings that 28% of the classroom discourse of the observed three Omani cycle two EFL teachers was in L1. The participating teachers have their own justifications for using of L1 in specific classroom situations i.e. learners' engagement, explaining new words and enhancing students' confidence. However, teachers' justifications could be criticized from the perspective of EFL pedagogy. For instance, the teachers claim that they use the L1 to engage the low achievers and make them take part in the different classroom activities. However, the use of Arabic in such situations might contradict with the aims of the classroom activities namely students' use and practice of English. In addition, Auerbach (1993) states that in English classrooms, the students should be exposed to English to the fullest extent possible as the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they learn it.

In addition, participants believed that the use of L1 in teaching new words through the direct translations or Arabic explanation saves class time and helps students get the meanings of the target vocabularies straightforwardly. However, this might develop a false belief among students about word for word translation in acquiring a target language. Harbord (1992) maintains that the use of L1 makes students believe that word for word translation is a suitable technique to learn English. Moreover, the meanings of the words change according to the phrases, chunks and context they are used in and this contradicts with getting the meaning of vocabularies straightforwardly.

The participating teachers also think that using the L1 helps students feel comfortable and confident in EFL classes. However, available ELT literature provides alternative ways and techniques that can be used to enhance learners' confidence using the target language. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) suggest that in communicative language teaching and through giving students opportunity to express their ideas in regular basis and by encouraging cooperative interaction between the students themselves and students and teachers using the target language, students' security and confidence is enhanced.

What are the possible ways to minimize L1 use in Omani cycle two EFL classes?

The study highlights different techniques which are applied

and suggested by the participating ELF teachers to minimize L1 use in Omani cycle two EFL classes e.g. miming, synonyms and antonyms, visual aids, definitions and context instead of explaining the meanings of words in Arabic or giving the Arabic equivalences.

The reported ways and techniques are classroom-based and practiced successfully in Omani EFL classes, therefore, should be enhanced and appraised. To start with, explaining new words in English- rather than direct translation- using different ways, techniques and aids takes time and effort but can help in extracting students' attention to learn the new words more sufficiently. According to Heng (2011), translation alone is not a sufficient strategy for students to grasp the exact meaning of the words and be able to use the words orally and/or in a written form.

Students' understanding of classroom instructions which seems as one of the challenges in Omani cycle two EFL classes was also presented with useful suggestions and practices. In other words, the participants proposed effective techniques to reduce the L1 use when teachers are clarifying classroom instructions. To assure that everybody understands the instructions, participants proposed that the teacher should repeat the instructions, repeat them slowly or ask a student to repeat them. Teachers also suggested stressing on the key words in the instruction because this technique might extract students' attention to what exactly is required in the tasks. Teachers also suggested using a simpler language e.g. terms and structures that match students' levels. They explained that using terms which are above the students' levels and/or using complex structures might distract students' understanding of the goal of the activity. Teachers also assumed that dividing the instructions into smaller parts so the teachers should make sure that students understand each part of the instructions before moving to the next part. This technique can be beneficial for tasks and activities that have more than one requirement. Furthermore, teachers assert that the whiteboard can be used to clarify the instructions due to the visual appealing students are provided with so, students can refer to the explanation at any time during the activity.

Findings also highlight the role of encouragement in maximizing the use of English. The research finds that there are four techniques that can be used to encourage students to use English. The first one is the use of reinforcement which includes using praising words, gifts and marks. Young learners like being praised by their teachers and such reinforcement strengthen their self-confidence. The second technique is using group and pair work to increase students' talking time in English. In such ways the chances of students' interactions between each other expand. However, their use of English should be strictly monitored as they might switch to Arabic. Moreover, in such situations the high achievers can help low achievers to use English. The third possible way to increase the use of English is by surrounding students with an English using environment. This means that English

should be used inside and outside classrooms. It should not be limited to the EFL classes. To achieve this, English clubs should be activated in schools through arranging programs such as English broadcast, chants, competitions, plays and an English day in which EFL students have chances to use English and expose their talents in English. Auerbach (1993) states that students should be exposed to English to the fullest extent possible, as the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they learn it. When students are surrounded with English, they will begin to think in English.

The last possible way for encouraging students to use English in Omani EFL classes is teachers' and students' preparations of the lessons. When teachers prepare their lessons, they can prepare for ways in which they avoid the use of Arabic. Preparation also helps teachers predict the situations where there is a need for the L1 and try to make alternatives in English. Liu & Zeng (2015) assert that encouraging students to prepare their lesson before the classes will help in reducing the use of L1 during the classes.

## Conclusion

The study emphasizes the maximization of the use of English in TEFL classes to the extent possible and minimizing the use of L1 to specific situations in which there are no possible alternatives to make students understand in English. Not all TEFL teachers taking place in this study believe that the use of L1 in TEFL is unavoidable but all of them agree that the use of L1 should be minimized as much as possible asserting that there are many workable techniques and ways which can be

followed to help TEFL learners understand classroom discourse through the means of TL rather than L1. Some of the suggested techniques are within the teacher's scope and capabilities to put in practice e.g. repetition of instruction, writing instructions on WB, praising students. Other techniques and ways might require interference and support of the school administration and the Ministry of Education. For instance, surrounding students with an English speaking school environment by organizing out of class activities such as English clubs and social events is school-administration responsibility. Likewise, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to train teachers to effectively use the CLT strategies, which include group and pair work, in their classroom in order to maximize the use of English and minimize the use of L1. The Ministry of Education also should be responsible for providing students with visual dictionaries in which the new words are connected with images and explained in language that matches the level of the students. Findings further show that small classes can be a way to maximize the use of English. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education to reduce the number of students in such classes to allow EFL teachers have enough time with each student and prepare remedial plans for the low achievers.

Finally, the findings encourage further and future research to explore why EFL teachers use L1 in EFL classes and extend the scope and focus of such research to include more schools and teachers within the Omani context.

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