

Students' Attitudes Towards Using the Native language in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom at Mutah University

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Abstract:

This study aimed at examining the attitudes of EFL students' towards using the native language in the foreign language classroom at the English language and literature department at Mutah university, in the southern part of Jordan. In order to achieve the results of the study a questionnaire of 28 items was prepared and checked for validity and reliability. The participants were (239) first to fourth year students who responded to the questionnaire. Means, standard deviations, t-test, One-way ANOVA and Scheffe tests were applied to obtain results of the study. The results of the study showed the attitude of the participants towards using the NL in the EFL classroom ranked Medium with a mean score of (3.232) and a standard deviation of (0.77). With respect to year of study, results revealed a significant statistical difference in participants' responses in favor of the first year. Results also showed a significant statistical difference in students' perspectives attributed to GPA in favor of the 60-69 Level. However, the results showed no significant statistical difference in students' attitudes attributed to gender. Based on these results recommendations were made.

Key words: Attitudes; EFL; Native Language; gender; year of study; Mutah university..

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1. 1 INTRODUCTION

The use of the native language (L1) in the foreign language (FL) classroom has been a controversial question for many years. Controversy about this issue continues where scholars in the field of language learning such as (Brown, 2000; Cook, 2001; Tang, 2002) are either with or against the use of L1 in the FL classroom. The debate is based on the argument that using the L1 in the FL classroom is facilitating or hindering language learning. Some believe that using the L1 may lower students' anxiety and help in learning the FL, while others believe that the only chance for students to be exposed to FL is in the classroom and to use L1 would be depriving students from this exposure to FL. Both sides have their arguments either for or against the use of L1 in the FL classroom. Such arguments among Applied Linguists (AL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers have produced an immense body of research which has contributed to the development of the methods of FL teaching and learning. Speaking English is considered the bridge of communication and the media through which people can express their thoughts, feelings, ideas, desires, and attitude, (Richard and Rodgers, 2001).

Yet using English in the EFL classroom seems to be quiet difficult to foreign language learners. Many times learners and teachers resort to using their L1 instead of FL in order to express themselves in the classroom. Teachers find it easier to convey the message across to the students. Very few students venture to using the Foreign language for different reasons. Some teachers resort to using the native language in the classroom to save time

in trying to explain the material in the foreign language. The debate of using the L1 or FL in the classroom has been a controversy for many years (Brown, 2000). Some researchers believe that L1 in the EFL classroom can help and promote learning of the foreign language (Hall and cook, 2012). Cook (2001) and tang (2002) also suggest that using L1 in FL classrooms is quiet beneficial and should be encouraged. Cameron (2001) also reported that in the EFL classroom learners truly prefer using L1 when looking for help whether from their peers or from the teacher. This could be due to their inability to express themselves enough in the target language. In Jordanian schools and universities many instructors still resort to using the L1 (Arabic) during teaching an EFL classroom.

2. Literature Review

There has been a lot of controversy regarding the use of the native language for teaching or learning the foreign language (Mukattash, 2003). These opposing views have led to arguments for and arguments against the use of NL in the foreign language classroom. Some researchers believe that the use of NL in the EFL classroom prevents learners from being exposed to the Foreign language and therefore deprives the students from learning it, (littlewood & Yu, 2011). However other researchers believe that using the NL in the EFL classroom may facilitate learning, (Mohebbi, 2012). Some researchers such as Machaal, (2012) argue that using the NL in EFL classroom is quite beneficial for students. Swain and Lapkin (2000) also advocate for NL use in the EFL classroom for it helps students carry out activities that are cognitively and linguistically complex. (Storch

& Aldosari, 2010) also highlight that NL use is a productive tool that plays a major role in the teaching and learning process. Using the NL has many positive uses argue researchers such as (McCan, 2005; Cameron, 2001) such uses as explaining errors, explaining grammatical rules. From a psychological point of view using the NL lowers students' anxiety in learning, (Tan 2017). Some have argued that NL use is time saving technique, (Harbord, 1992). Other researchers who believe that the NL use is beneficial and facilitating for the process of learning such as (song, 2009; tang, 2002; Almusharraf, A.M, 2021). Lower level students require some use of NL in the classroom argues Mouhanna, (2009). Cook (2001) also argues that low level students require grammatical instructions in their NL due to their restricted linguistic abilities. Other researchers who support the use of NL in the EFL classroom include Greggio & Gil, (2007) who argue that it is helpful in assisting the language teaching and learning process. Having presented studies that backup the use of NL in the EFL classroom, the researcher now presents studies that believe a monolingual classroom setting is more beneficial for the language teaching learning process. Some researchers such as Harmer, (2007) & Hawks, (2001) argue that the classroom has to be monolingual (not resorting to the NL) and that teachers need to use the Target language without reference to the NL. Ellis (1984) explained that according to several researchers the NL is not needed in the EFL classroom and that the use of NL may deprive learners the chance to be exposed to the target language. Researchers such as (Chaudron, 1988) argue that if the input in the EFL classroom is in the target language this would ensure that the targeted learning was successful. Also Oz, H, & Karaazmak, F, (2019) concluded that students

preferred that only English is to be used in the classroom. They also showed that low proficiency students were more likely to prefer using L1 than high proficiency students.

3. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Some researchers argue for using the Native language in the FL classroom (cook, 2002) while other researchers argue against using NL in the FL classroom (Brown, 2000). Those who advocate for an “English only” teaching believe that the use of the NL would be preventing language acquisition. Forman, (2005) called for a balanced policy of giving equal importance to both the native and the Foreign language in the classroom. Whether to follow an English only policy or a balanced policy is not clear for students at Mutah university in Jordan. Hence the idea for this study arose, which is to investigate the attitudes of learners of English as a foreign language at the English language and literature department at Mutah university towards using NL in their FL classes.

In this study the researcher attempts to investigate the attitudes of students towards using the native language (Arabic) in the EFL classroom despite the controversy towards this topic. Thus the study attempts to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the students’ attitudes towards using the NL (Arabic) in the EFL classroom from their perspectives?
2. Is there a statistical significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the attitudes of students toward using the NL in the EFL classroom

attributed to gender, year of study, and Students' GPA?

4. Significance of the Study

A major significance of this research is that it enlightens professors at the English department at Mutah university with respect to how their students view using the NL in the English classroom. The results of this study may direct instructors to either continue to use the native language or to resort to a monolingual class where only the target language is used. It is also significant for students to realize that it is not a crime to use the NL in the EFL classroom and that part of learning a foreign language may involve some use of the NL.

5. Methodology and Procedures

The following section introduces a description of the procedures of the study, the population and sample of the study, a description of the study instrument used to collect the data, instrument validity and reliability and finally the data analysis used in the study.

5.1 Research Design

The study followed the descriptive analytical approach to achieve its aims, which is Mainly to examine and describe the attitude of students at the English language and literature department at Mutah university towards using the NL in the EFL classroom from their perspectives.

5.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study were all the students enrolled at the English language and literature department during the first

semester of the academic year 2023-2024 who comprised of (467) male and female students (Admission and registration division, 2023). The questionnaire was distributed randomly to (250) male and female students, (242) were returned, three disregarded since required data was not provided, leaving the sample to be (239) which is (51.18%) of the population. Which is acceptable statistically based on the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970)

5.2.1 Pilot study

The questionnaire was distributed to (30) male and female students not included in the study sample to examine the psychometric characteristics of the study instrument.

5.2.2 Characteristics of Participants

The demographic data of the study sample was also obtained through the first part of the questionnaire. This data included the variables of gender, year of study and the grade point average (GPA) of the students as shown in Table (1).

Table 1. The Distribution of the Study Sample

Students' Characteristics	Categories	Frequencies	(%)
Gender	Male	79	33.08
	Female	160	66.92
Student's Year of study	First year	63	26.32
	Second Year	65	27.07
	Third year	59	24.81
	Fourth Year	52	21.80
GPA (Grade	60 – 69	54	22.59

Point Average)	70 – 79	116	48.54
	80 – 89	47	19.67
	90 – 100	22	9.21

5.3 The Instrument

To achieve the aim of the study which is to examine and describe the attitudes of students at the English language and literature department at Mutah university towards using the NL in the EFL classroom, the researcher designed a questionnaire comprising of 28 items. In order to prepare the questionnaire previous studies related to the subject were reviewed (Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Oz, & Karaazmak, (2019). The questionnaire was checked for validity by being reviewed by a number of university professors specialized in the field. After taking the juries' suggestions a number of items were rewritten leaving the questionnaire to have 28 items.

5.3.1 Instrument Validity

5.3.1.1 Face Validity

The validity of the questionnaire was checked by a panel of specialized university professors who were asked to give their comments towards the items of the questionnaire in terms of suitability to the field, their clarity, the appropriateness of a five likert scale of the items. They were also asked to add, modify or delete any items of the questionnaire. Based on their views a number of items were rewritten based on having 80% of the jury agree to their modification.

5.3.1.2 Internal Consistency

To achieve the internal consistency of the instrument, it was administered to a sample of (30) male and female students from

the population of the study but who were excluded from the study sample. Pearson correlations was calculated between the degree of individual items to the overall degree of the questionnaire as shown in table (2).

Table 2 Correlation Coefficient between the Items and overall degree of the Instrument

No	Person Correlation	No	Person Correlation	No	Person Correlation
1	0.657**	11	0.509**	21	0.621**
2	0.670**	12	0.647**	22	0.605**
3	0.714**	13	0.589**	23	0.758**
4	0.595**	14	0.722**	24	0.698**
5	0.684**	15	0.584**	25	0.680**
6	0.736**	16	0.501**	26	0.593**
7	0.651**	17	0.609**	27	0.610**
8	0.687**	18	0.715**	28	0.598**
9	0.622**	19	0.601**	-	-
10	0.678**	20	0.617**	-	-

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Table (2) shows the correlation coefficient of the items to the overall degree of the questionnaire at the statistical significant value of (0.01) ranging between (0.501) and (0.758) which indicated an overall internal consistency among the questionnaire items.

5.3.2 Instrument Reliability

Instrument reliability was ensured through Cronbach Alpha and Pearson correlation through the test-retest method of the pilot study. The results are shown in table (3)

Table 3 Correlation Coefficient and Cronbach Alpha

No of Items	Person Correlation	Cronbach Alpha
28	0.87*	0.906

Table (3) shows that the instrument is highly reliable for the Cronbach Alpha was (0.906) and the Pearson Correlation was (0.87) which is considered statistically significant at the level of (0.05).

Marking the study instrument

A five Likert scale was used to mark the items of the questionnaire. Strongly Agree was marked 5 points; Agree was marked with 4 points; Neutral was marked with 3 points, disagree was market 2 points and Strongly disagree was marked 1 point. The results were distributed over three levels (high, Medium, Low) as follows: Low: less than or equal to 2.33, Medium: more than or equal to 2.34 to less than or equal to 3.67; High more than or equal to 3.68 to five.

6. Statistical Analyses

The researcher used SPSS V. 24 to process the data obtained through the questionnaire to answer the research questions. The statistical analysis used are Descriptive statistics using frequencies, percentages, and the mean scores of students'

responses to the items. In addition to t-test and one-way ANOVA, Scheffe was conducted to show statistical differences in the study variables.

7. Results of the Study

7.1 Results Pertaining to the First Research Question

To answer the first research question; What are the students’ attitudes towards using the L1 (Arabic) in the EFL classroom from their perspectives? Means and standard deviations and the level of students’ attitudes on the items of the questionnaire were calculated as shown in table 4.

Table 4 Mean scores, Standard Deviations, Rank, and Level of agreement of students’ Attitudes towards using NL in the EF classroom.

No	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Level of agreement
12	Arabic should be used in EFL classroom when students fail to understand the material in English.	3.797	1.04	1	High
1	The use of Arabic (NL) helps students learn English	3.752	1.01	2	High
9	Arabic should be used to clarify the meaning of words and expressions	3.617	0.99	3	Medium
18	Translation should be used when necessary in the EFL classroom	3.564	1.06	4	Medium
8	Arabic should be used to give instructions in the	3.534	0.93	5	Medium

No	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Level of agreement
5	classroom Students should be allowed to use Arabic in the EFL classroom at the beginners' level.	3.496	1.08	6	Medium
28	Arabic should not be used in learning the speaking skill.	3.384	1.15	7	Medium
10	Arabic should be used to explain grammar rules	3.353	1.16	8	Medium
26	Arabic should not be used in learning the reading skill	3.323	1.16	9	Medium
27	Arabic should not be used in learning the writing skill	3.293	1.20	10	Medium
25	Arabic should not be used in learning the listening skill	3.286	1.10	11	Medium
21	Students should not be allowed to use Arabic in the EFL classroom at the intermediate level	3.248	1.05	12	Medium
24	Arabic should not be used in EFL classroom to carry out pair and group work.	3.248	0.96	13	Medium
4	Arabic should not be used at all in the EFL classroom.	3.233	1.14	14	Medium
23	Arabic should not be used to explain grammar rules	3.211	1.19	15	Medium
3	Arabic should be used when learning the reading skill	3.203	1.04	16	Medium

No	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Level of agreement
11	Arabic should be used in EFL classroom to carry out pair and group work.	3.181	1.11	17	Medium
22	Arabic should not be used to give instructions in the classroom	3.173	1.07	18	Medium
13	Students should be allowed to ask questions in Arabic in an EFL classroom	3.135	1.09	19	Medium
20	Arabic should not be used in the EFL classroom to clarify meaning of words and expressions	3.075	1.06	20	Medium
17	Students should be allowed to use Arabic in the EFL classroom at the intermediate level	3.068	0.99	21	Medium
6	Arabic should be used when learning the speaking skill	3.038	1.15	22	Medium
15	Arabic should be used frequently in the EFL classroom.	2.947	1.16	23	Medium
14	Arabic should be used when learning the listening skill	2.917	1.25	24	Medium
16	Arabic should be used when learning the writing skill	2.902	1.22	25	Medium
19	Students should not be	2.895	1.20	26	Medium

No	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank	Level of agreement
	allowed to use Arabic in the EFL classroom at the beginners level.				um
2	Arabic should be used All the time in the EFL classroom.	2.857	1.16	27	Medium
7	Students should be allowed to use Arabic in the EFL classroom at the Advanced level.	2.774	1.22	28	Medium
	All Items	3.232	0.77	-	Medium

Table (4) shows that the level of students' attitudes towards using NL in the EFL classroom was medium. The overall mean score was (3.232) with a standard deviation of (0.77). At the item level items (12, and 1) were ranked number one and two respectively with a level of attitude marked high. Their mean scores were (3.797 – 3.752) while the rest of the items were at the level medium and their mean scores ranged between (2.774-3.617). None of the items received any low level rank. Table (4) also shows that the standard deviations of the students' attitudes on the questionnaire ranged between (0.93- 1.25) which reveals the closeness of the students' attitudes

7.2 Results Pertaining to the Second Research Question

Is there a statistical significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the attitudes of students toward using the L1 (Arabic) in the EFL classroom attributed to gender, year of study, and GPA? To answer this question statistical analysis were conducted of the difference in students' attitudes towards using NL in the EFL classroom due to gender, year of study and GPA. A (t-test) for the independent variable was conducted prior to that levene's test was applied to ensure homogeneity of data. Results of levene's test showed the probability value of equal variance of groups was (0.221) for the variable of gender, (0.183 and (0.205) for the variables of year of study and GPA respectively. These values are higher than the statistical value (0.05) which shows that the homogeneity of variance between the groups. The results are presented below.

7.2.1 Differences due to Gender

A (t-test) was made to show any statistical significant difference at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the attitudes of students at the English language and literature department towards using NL in the EFL classroom due to gender. The results are shown in table 5.

Table 5 Results of the t-test of the significant statistical analysis in students' attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom attributed to gender

Gend er	N	Mea n	Standard Deviation	t- valu e	p- valu e
Male	79	3.192	0.32	-0.438	0.66
Femal e	160	3.228	0.47	8	

Table (5) shows no statistical significant difference between the mean scores of students' attitudes towards using NL in the EFL classroom due to gender. The t-value was (-0.438) which is a value that is not statistically significant at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) which mean the students' attitudes male and female are close.

7.2.2 Differences due to Year of Study

To reveal any statistical significant differences in students' attitudes towards using NL in the EFL classroom due to year of study, a (one-way ANOVA) was conducted as shown in table (6).

Table 6 Results of the One-way ANOVA of variance in students’ attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom attributed to year of study.

Year of study	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	f-value	p-value
First year	63	3.432	0.46	5.63*	0.00
Second Year	65	3.250	0.44		
Third year	59	3.100	0.42		
Fourth Year	52	3.095	0.39		

*Significant at the (0.05) level

Table (6) shows significant statistical differences in the mean scores of students’ attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom due to year of study. The (f) value calculated was (5.63) which is considered to be statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$). To pinpoint the sources of differences Scheffe test was conducted to obtain the post Hoc Multiple Comparison between the mean scores as shown in table (7).

Table 7 Results of Scheffe Post Hoc Comparison in students' attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom attributed to year of study

Year of study	Mean	Year of study			
		First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year
First year	3.432	-	0.182	0.332*	0.337*
Second Year	3.250	-	-	0.150	0.155
Third year	3.100	-	-	-	0.005
Fourth Year	3.095	-	-	-	-

*Significant at the (0.05) level.

Results in table (7) show that the differences are in favor of the first year students whose Mean score towards using the NL in the EFL classroom was higher than students in the second, third and fourth year. The higher mean scores were (0.337) and (0.332) which are statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

7.2.3 Differences due to GPA

To reveal the statistical difference in students' responses due to GPA a (ONE WAY ANOVA) was conducted as shown in table (8)

Table 8 Results of the One-way ANOVA of variance in students’ attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom attributed to GPA.

GP A	N	Me an	Standard Deviation	f- val ue	p- val ue
60 -	5	3.4	0.37		
70 -	1	3.3	0.42	6.4	0.0
80 -	4	3.0	0.58	3*	0
90 -	2	3.0	0.31		

*Significant at the (0.05) level.

Table (8) shows a clear significant statistical differences in the mean scores of students’ attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom due to GPA. The calculated (f) value was (6.43) which is considered statistically significant at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) and to show the sources of difference a Scheffe Post Hoc Multiple Comparison was conducted as shown in table (9)

Table 9 Results of Scheffe Post Hoc Comparison in students' attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom attributed to year of study

GPA	Mean	GPA			
		60 – 69	70 – 79	80 – 89	90 – 100
60 – 69	3.482	-	0.153	0.385*	0.471*
70 – 79	3.329	-	-	0.232	0.318
80 – 89	3.097	-	-	-	0.086
90 – 100	3.011	-	-	-	-

*Significant at the (0.05) level.

The results in table (9) show that the differences is in favor of the GPA of (60-69) and (70-79) whose mean score of their attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom was higher than the students whose GPA was (80-89) and (90- 100). The highest differences between the mean scores was (0.385) and (0.474) which are statistically significant at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

8. Discussion

This research has attempted to answer the research questions which are: what are the attitudes of male and female students at the English language and literature department at Mutah university towards using the NL in the EFL classroom from their perspectives? And are there any significant statistical differences at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) among the participants attributed to gender, year of study and student's GPA? A five-likert scale questionnaire was distributed to the sample of the study and upon receiving the questionnaires they were all statistically analyzed using descriptive analyses (means and standard deviations) in addition to using inferential statistics such as t-test, Scheffes test, and Levenes test. The results revealed that the attitudes of the students towards using the NL in the EFL classroom came at medium according to the rank scale used, only two items received a high rank namely item 12 and item 1. The items read as (*Arabic should be used in EFL classroom when students fail to understand the material in English. And The use of Arabic (NL) helps students learn English.*) Naturally students would agree and perhaps strongly agree to reverting to the NL when they don't understand or fail to understand the material in the target language. This result is in accordance with the findings of (Hall and cook, 2012; Mukattash, 2003; Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Almusharraf, 2021) who argued for a positive attitude of the use of the NL in the EFL classroom. The overall result of students' attitudes was Medium, which is in favor of using the NL in the EFL classroom. As for the second research question, results revealed a significant statistical difference in students attitudes towards using the native language in the EFL

classroom due to year of study. It was revealed that the first year students were the most in favor of using the NL in the EFL classroom. This result could be explained that the first year students are the least proficient in English. They have had little experience in using the TL since they had just finished high school and were admitted to the university. While the second third and fourth year students had had quiet an exposure to the TL and could manage well without reverting to the NL. Results pertaining to GPA also revealed that the students with the lowest GPA had higher attitudes towards using the NL in the EFL classroom as opposed to students with higher GPAs. Again the explanation could also be that low GPA students don't have enough proficiency in English to prefer its use over NL. This result is similar to that of Mouhanna, (2009) who showed that low achieving students are in need of the NL to Learn. Finally, result pertaining to students' attitudes towards native language use in the EFL classroom revealed no significant statistical differences due to students' Gender. This result indicated that gender has nothing to do with using the NL or not in the classroom. Students whether male or female have similar learning situations and agree to the use of the NL in similar ways.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

It is concluded based on the results of this study that the Use of the native language in the EFL classroom is considered helpful for students and sometimes even required for Low level students whose GPA is in the low level (60-69). The NL is also required for beginner students those who are first year at the university, whose English proficiency is also still very low. It is obvious that



students benefit from NL use in the classroom when they lack the ability to comprehend the explanations and instructions in the foreign language. The majority of the students agreed that “Arabic should be used when the students fail to understand in the Foreign language.” These conclusions are most needed for teachers, who can use the native language in the classroom to reach low level and beginner (i.e. first year) students who would otherwise be lost if they don’t receive the NL support they need to understand and learn the material, (Moore, 2013). Therefore, it is preferable that the foreign language teacher needs to have some knowledge of the students’ native language to be able to occasionally use it to explain certain points that low level and beginner students find difficult, Carson & Kashiara, (2012). This makes English only” policy undesirable for Foreign language learners in Jordan since some use of the native language is beneficial for some students. Lower level students and beginners (i.e. first year) should have access to bilingual texts that include native language and foreign language explanations of certain grammar usage for example or of vocabulary.

Evidently the participants in the study are aware of what they need in the classroom. The lowest mean score (2.774) was for the item “Students should be allowed to use Arabic in the EFL classroom at Advanced level”. This finding reflects that students feel that they do not need the native language if they are “advanced” in English. They need it only when they lack foreign language knowledge to understand the class material. The results also showed a low mean score (2.857) for the item “Arabic should be used all the time in the EFL classroom” again this

reflects the high awareness of these students who want to learn English but need some native language support to help them in learning the foreign language; but not to use the native language all the time. However judicious use of the native language is required, Rasheed, (2022). Complete avoidance of the native language would be counterproductive for the reality of foreign language classroom, argues Bruen and Kelly, (2014). Recommendations based on these conclusions include: encouraging teachers to use the native language in the classroom when the situation calls for its use (i.e. when students fail to understand the material). Another recommendation is when teachers have mixed level students in the classroom he/she may divide students into groups and present each group with the material in the language they are able to understand him/her with.

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