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**Use of L1 in ESL classes: A study of
teachers' perceptions and practices**

By Matasam Rashid Mubarak Al-Raaisi

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Use of L1 in ESL classes: A study of teachers' perceptions and practices

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Use of L1 in ESL classes: A study of teachers' perceptions and practices

Abstract: This thesis examined the declared perceptions of Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in beginner English classes. Since the issue of using the first language (L1) in the second language (L2) classes has been a debatable issue, this study attempted to gain understanding of the place of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in a specific language centre in Oman by focusing on a sample of ten Arab teachers. The teachers were chosen from two programmes where the students are more or less beginners in English. To achieve the aim mentioned above, this study made use of two qualitative research methods: two group interviews and four classroom observations. Each group interview consisted of five teachers with different teaching experiences. The study revealed that teachers do use Arabic in their lessons as a last resort after they have tried various teaching methods first. When they realise that their students cannot understand a specific language item after using those methods, they resort to Arabic. However, they perceive it negatively in the classroom when students start using it, fearing that it will destroy the students' opportunities to practice the target language. Arabic, as the study highlighted, is used for both teaching purposes, such as teaching some grammatical structures, and also for non-teaching purposes, such as telling jokes. It is recommended that more research is done on ways of using Arabic to address a specific language skill, especially grammar and vocabulary rather than focusing on all the skills in a single study. It is also suggested that when writing a policy regarding the scope of using Arabic in English classes, the choice of when and how to use it should be left to teachers.

Keywords: Arabic, L1, English, L2, perceptions, Language Centre, beginning students

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“No man is poor who has a Godly mother.”
– Abraham Lincoln

My two sisters – I am grateful to both of you, your patience and understanding.

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Table of contents

	Page
Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of contents	4
Chapter one: Introduction	6
Chapter two: Literature review	9
2. 1 Introduction	9
2.2 Actual behaviours of L2 teachers in using L1	9
2.3 Inconclusive debate	11
2.3.1 Why L1?	11
2.3.2 Counter-arguments	13
2.4 Teachers' and students' perceptions of using L1 in L2 classrooms: Case studies	14
2.5 The situation in Language Centre	16
2.6 Conclusion	17
Chapter three: Methodology	19
3.1 Introduction	19
3.2 Research questions and objectives	19
3.3 Research strategy	20
3.4 Participants	21
3.5 Data collection methods	22
3.5.1 Group interviews	22
3.5.2 Classroom observations	24
3.6 Analysis process	25
3.7 Trustworthiness	26
3.8 Ethical procedure	27
Chapter four: Results and analysis	28
4.1 Introduction	28
4.2 Do the teachers use Arabic in their classes?	28
4.3 When do they use it?	28
4.3.1 The teachers' reported behaviours	29
4.3.2 The teachers' actual behaviours	31
4.4 Why do they use Arabic?	32
4.4.1 The teachers' reported reasons	32
4.4.2 The actual contextual reasons	35
4.5 Do the teachers allow their students to use Arabic?	36

4.5.1 What was reported...	36
4.5.2 What actually happened...	37
4.6 What policy should be implemented regarding the use of Arabic	37
Chapter five: Discussion	39
5.1 Introduction	39
5.2 When Arabic?	39
5.3 Why Arabic?	40
5.3 Do teachers allow their students to use Arabic?	42
5.4 Teachers' views towards policy	43
5.5 What do the results mean?	43
Chapter six: Conclusion	45
References	48
Appendices	52
Appendix one: Interview schedule	52
Appendix two: Observational schedule	55
Appendix three: Participant consent forms	57
Appendix four: An example o the coded analysis	60
Appendix five: Analysis tables	62

Chapter One

Introduction

When I first started my career as a teacher of English, I had had no previous practical teaching experience, except a fairly superficial one in teaching some kids in a small private school for one month. Being so enthusiastic about teaching in a university, any useful piece of advice was of interest to me. On my first day at work, one of the teachers from the programme I was assigned to teach on offered me a shocking piece of advice: “Do not kill students by speaking in Arabic to them.” As a novice teacher, I was bound to believe that Arabic could be useful to the students, but after being offered such a piece of advice, I stopped using even a single word of Arabic. I did not want to ‘kill the students’ as that senior teacher suggested. After working for about one term, I started to be paranoid about my teaching. I felt I was not helping my students. I came to the conclusion that using a little bit of Arabic would not harm anyone, so then I began using a little bit of Arabic in my classes. To my amazement, it really worked.

The previous situation depicts an image of a new teacher stepping into a teaching world where using the mother tongue in teaching a foreign language is highly debatable. In fact, using L1 “has been one of the greatest dilemmas in the foreign language class for nearly a century” (Medgyes, 1999 cited in Al-Shidhani, 2009, p. 184).

Indeed, using the first language (L1) in the learning and teaching of the target language (L2) has caused controversy in the field of teaching. Some researchers, including L2 teachers, appear to be in favour of using L1 in L2 classes. This positive view towards using L1 has only been adopted *recently* because using L1 was seen as an ineffective teaching strategy in the past (VanPatten, 2003; Al-Hinai, 2006). In fact, perceiving L1 as a helpful resource in learning or

teaching L2 has not been taken for granted yet. Many researchers and teachers seem to reject the use of L1 in L2 classes. Several justifications have been advanced by those in favour of using L1 and those against its use in L2 classes, which will be highlighted later in the literature review. Clearly, reviewing the vast literature suggests that this controversial topic has received considerable attention, and a number of studies looking at the situation in schools, colleges, universities and even children's centres have been conducted recently. Some of those studies, such as Mouhanna's one (2009), showed that L1 can be used in L2 classes, especially with students of low proficiency in L2, whereas others showed completely the opposite (e.g Nazary, 2008).

By taking a closer look at the studies conducted on this issue, there seem to be three important points that need to be tackled. First, the studies that examined the use of L1 in L2 classes looked at either the perceptions of teachers and students, or the teachers' actual behaviours. This study, however, will take account of both teachers' perceptions and their actual behaviours in the classroom. Second, although this issue has been examined in different contexts, there has not been any study done to examine the use of Arabic in beginner English classes in the targeted Language Centre. Third, unlike most of the studies that primarily used questionnaires as a data collection method and which resulted in mere description rather than an exploration of reality (for example, Levine 2003; Al-Hadhrani, 2008; Nazary, 2008; Vaddapalli & Al-Baini, 2012), this study will look at the issue in depth by using qualitative research methods rather than quantitative ones in exploring the actual behaviours of L2 teachers in using L1 in the classrooms. Indeed, examining such an issue can have an important bearing on classroom practices.

The following research questions will be addressed:

- 1) What are the declared perceptions of Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in a language centre in Oman?
- 2) How is Arabic used by Arab teachers of English in low-proficiency English classrooms in a language centre in Oman?

The organisation of this study will be as follows. Chapter 2 (literature review) will discuss various themes related to using L1 in teaching L2. First, it will focus on the actual behaviours of L2 teachers in using L1 in the classrooms. It will then present the debate over using L1 in L2 classes with reference to arguments made by researchers and educationalists. After that, it will shed light on the findings of some studies from around the world investigating teachers' and students' perceptions towards using L1 in teaching or learning L2. Finally, it will narrow the situation down by focusing on the Omani context.

After pinpointing the previous themes in chapter 2, chapter 3 (Methodology) will elaborate the stages of the data collection. It will describe all the procedures and processes followed from collecting the data to presenting the findings. The results will be reported in chapter 4 (Results and Analysis). Chapter 5 (Discussion) will summarise the significant findings from chapter 4, and finally, the conclusion, chapter 6, will attempt to answer the two research questions and present the recommendations and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Two

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

It is misleading to think that the debate over using L1 in L2 classrooms is the same debate as using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in language teaching. In fact, the two are underpinned by different theories. GTM appeared in the 18th century and its underlying principle was to teach grammar to the learners using their mother tongue by translating L2 texts into L1 (Brooks-Lewis, 2009). Therefore, the mother tongue was more or less the medium of instruction in L2 classes. This study, however, focuses on the use of L1 in L2 classrooms, in which L1 is seen as a helpful tool in teaching and learning, not as a major method. This chapter will elaborate on (1) teachers' actual behaviours in using L1 in L2 classes, (2) the debate over the use of L1, (3) several studies that looked at teachers' and students' perceptions, (4) the context of this study, and it will conclude with (5), a summary of the aims and the main research questions.

2.2 Actual behaviours of L2 teachers in using L1

Several studies that looked at actual behaviours of L2 teachers in using L1 in the classroom highlighted various common ways among L2 teachers. Four ways of using L1 in teaching L2 were suggested by Cook (2001) who maintained that L1 can be used to explain grammar, manage the class, check students' understanding of new words and explain complicated activities. Similarly, in a study done by Levine (2003), the teachers' uses of the mother tongue in teaching other languages were investigated using online surveys. It was concluded that teachers mostly use L1 to manage the class, explain difficult bits of grammar and discuss assignments.

What is critical about this study is that nothing is said regarding the level of the students' proficiency. Indeed, knowing the learners' level might point to the types of learners who actually need L1 in learning L2. Along similar lines, in another study conducted by Al-Hadhrani (2008) to discover how Arabic is used by the teachers in English classes, the researcher found out that the teachers tend to use Arabic in the teaching of vocabulary and complicated concepts, and giving instructions. One strength of this study was that the researcher used interviews rather than surveys, which resulted in detailed responses from the teachers, but again the proficiency level of the students was not taken into account although the age group was indicated. However, an example of a study that considered the level of the students when investigating such an issue was done by Anggraeni (2012). It involved six observations of beginner English classes in a children's teaching centre in Indonesia. The study found that the teachers used L1 to "give instructions", "manage classroom", "reduce anxiety", "explain new words" and "check comprehension" (p. 19). In addition to the previous research findings, educationalists have also suggested ways in which L1 could be employed in teaching L2. For instance, Cameron (2001) provided teachers with recommendations on using L1 when teaching L2 to young learners. As he stressed, two effective ways of using L1 are chatting with the pupils and correcting their errors.

Teachers also seem to use L1 to maintain and sustain the flow of L2 verbal classroom interaction (Yigzwa, 2012). One way of doing this is through code-switching. In its simplest sense, code-switching, as defined by Weinreich (1953), is "switch[ing] from one language to the other according to the appropriate changes in speech situation" (as cited in Redouane, 2005, p. 1921). As Redouane (2005) emphasised, code-switching is very common in the interaction and conversations of bilingual speakers. Since second language classrooms are one of those bilingual contexts in which the students and the teacher sometimes share the same L1, code-switching

frequently occurs. As noted by Nilep (2006), speakers may switch between two languages to repair breakdowns in interactions. For example, in a study conducted by Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2005), the discussions of L2 learners of German from Alberta University were recorded and analysed. The findings showed that one of the situations in which the learners switch between English and German is when their knowledge of L2 fails. Reflecting once again on L2 classes, some teachers allow their students to code-switch and the teachers themselves do code-switch in order to keep the discussion going and maintain the flow of the classroom interaction. Although some might speculate that code-switching in L2 classes can have a negative impact on their learning process, Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2005) asserted that "permission to use the L1 can be granted without fear of jeopardizing the language learning" if the teachers lead their students to understand "the purpose of the interacting" in the classroom (p. 265).

After shedding light on actual behaviours of teachers in using L1 in L2 classrooms, the following section will focus on the longstanding debate over the use of L1 in L2 classes.

2.3 Inconclusive Debate

2.3.1 Why L1?

There has been an inconclusive debate about whether learners' first language (L1) should be incorporated into the second language (L2) lessons or not. Educationalists and applied linguists seem to adopt either a positive or negative attitude towards the use of L1 in L2 classes. In this section, only opinions and arguments from both sides will be presented which cannot be conclusive since they are not supported by research evidence.

First of all, it has been argued that using L1 in L2 classes can improve interaction in the classroom and help students to do better in exams. For example, Senel (2010) emphasised that using L1 in L2 classrooms makes learners communicative because it encourages less confident learners to take part, and that will “improve the communication competence of the foreign language learner” (p. 110). Although this point seems to be logical in one way, it can be argued that confidence in using a language can be a matter of personality; and not directly related to weaknesses in language competence. It has also been claimed that when less competent learners use L1, they can understand L2 more and thus achieve better results. For instance, in a study by Bouangeune (2009), one group of learners was taught using only L2, while the other group was taught L2 using their first language, especially in translating some L2 texts. The results showed that the second group did better in exams than the first one. Taking a closer look at the results, it is assumed that the second group did better because exams do not generally seem to measure the learners’ competence in using a target language; rather, they seem to measure the learners’ knowledge of the target language, and the two are quite different. It might be true though that using L1 can help learners understand the materials better (books, grammatical rules, text comprehension), but L2 teachers need to be aware of the amount of using L1 in their classes, depending on their students’ needs (Harmer, 2001).

Second, the vast literature suggests that there are three psychological reasons why L1 should be used in L2 classes. These reasons revolve around learners’ value of L1, their sense of security and the quality of teacher-student relationships. Regarding value, it has been asserted that using L1- when teaching L2- can make students value the importance of their mother tongue. That is, they would feel that their first language is not “inferior to English” for example (Anaggraeni, 2012). Added to that, several researchers agreed that when learners’ mother tongue is used in

teaching L2, their sense of security can cause them to have a positive attitude towards the learning process. The sense of security results from the feeling that learners understand what is going on around them in the classroom and that they have a second way to understand L2 in cases where they face complicated structures (Al Sharaeai, 2012; Vaddapalli & Al-Bainy, 2012; Schweers, 1999).

Third, it has been maintained that using L1 can establish a positive teacher-student relationship. That is, allowing the use of only L2 in the classrooms can lead to “control and power on the teachers’ part”, and can thus affect the quality of teachers’ relationships with their students (Pablo, Lengeling, Zeni, Crawford & Goodwin, 2010).

After presenting some opinions behind the use of L1 in teaching L2, the following section will discuss several arguments put forward by those against the use of L1.

2.3.2 Counter-arguments

Several arguments have been advanced to reject the use of L1 in L2 classes. First of all, it has been argued that learners whose teachers use L1 in the classrooms are more likely to develop a habit of dependence on their first language in most if not all of their learning situations (Al Sharaeai, 2012). This claim was supported by Anggraeni (2012) who asserted that students who are allowed to use L1 in the classroom will always expect their teachers to use it since such learners get “addicted to it” (p. 1). Another counter view is that L1 and L2 have different linguistic systems, so allowing L1 to intrude in the teaching of L2 might impinge upon the learning process (Cook, 2001). That is, using L1 could enable learners to know difficult vocabulary and pieces of grammar of L2, but this might, in turn, give the learners false understanding and false meaning (Newson, 1998). For example, the words “allergic” and

“sensitive” in English have the same word in Arabic, so using L1 to explain both words can probably confuse learners. Also, some learners use their mother tongue to judge L2 structures in the classroom; therefore, their understanding and learning of L2 will probably be false (Pablo, Lengeling, Zeni, Crawford & Goodwin, 2010). The third argument against the use of L1 in L2 classrooms takes into account the amount of exposure learners need in order to succeed in learning another language. As Sharma (2006) noted, “the more students are exposed to English [L2], the more quickly they will learn” (p. 80). That is, using L2 in the classroom can push pupils into using the target language more and thus learning it quickly. In fact, some learners, as Vaddapalli and Al Bani (2012) mentioned, ‘refrain’ from using L1 in L2 classrooms because they prefer as much exposure to L2 as possible.

After considering the reasons why some educationalists encourage the use of L1 and some reject it, **section 3** will focus on some research findings of teachers’ and students’ views towards the use of L1 in L2 classes.

2.4 Teachers’ and students’ perceptions of using L1 in L2 classrooms: Case studies

Generally, it seems that there are two views of teachers and students towards the place of L1 in L2 classes: one is for the “**moderate**” use of L1 in L2 classes, which means using L1 to some extent, while the other is completely against the use of L1.

First of all, most of the studies tend to indicate that teachers and students perceive L1 as a supportive tool in learning L2. For example, in a study conducted in Mexico to investigate five teachers’ and 120 students’ perceptions towards using French or English with French and

English students who were learning Spanish, the findings revealed that the majority of the teachers felt that L1 (English or French) was conducive to learning Spanish, and most of the students viewed L1 as “positive and part of the teaching and learning process” (Pablo, Lengeling, Zeni, Crawford & Goodwin, 2010, p. 113). In addition to the previous study, Kovacic and Kirinic (2011) carried out a study looking at teachers’ and students’ views of the use of Croatian in English classes. More than half of the teachers and students agreed that Croatian should be used to some extent to teach or learn English. Although the findings of the previously mentioned studies can be very useful in influencing teachers’ decisions about whether L1 should be used or not, there is not a single indication of the level of the students’ proficiency, which could have influenced the results. However, one study conducted by Mouhanna (2009) took the level of the students’ proficiency into account while investigating the role of L1 in L2 classes. The study investigated the perceptions of beginner English learners in an Emirati university towards the use of Arabic in English lessons using online surveys. The study concluded that teachers should “incorporate this pedagogical tool [Arabic] for learning particularly at the lower levels” (p. 15).

On the other hand, several studies showed that using L1 in L2 classrooms is seen negatively, especially by the students rather than the teachers. For example, one study conducted in an Iranian university to examine the views of 85 students towards the use of Farsi in English classrooms showed that the majority of the students displayed some sort of “reluctance” towards using L1 and preferred to have full exposure to L2 (Nazary, 2008, p. 138). Another study that had similar findings was conducted by Vaddapalli and Al-Baini (2012) to investigate the perceptions of 100 pupils towards using Arabic in a university in Salalah. The findings revealed that most of the students thought that using Arabic can be helpful sometimes, but communication

should be in English only. The two studies point to a very important issue which is the preference of many L2 learners to have as much exposure to L2 as possible.

2.5 The situation in the Language Centre

After enrolling in the university, Omani students come to know that English is the medium of instruction in the university and they have to pass an exam after a foundation year of intensive English. Unlike what they experienced in their high schools where the medium of instruction was mainly Arabic and even their teachers of English would use a lot of Arabic, in the university, they find themselves in classes where only English is allowed and the modules in their major after they pass the foundation programme will be taught in English. It should be mentioned that there has been no study conducted to investigate the use of Arabic in English classes in the Language Centre. However, one study was done at **a school** level and one at **a college** level in the Omani context. First, Al-Hinai (2005) conducted a study in which he observed and recorded four classes in an elementary school and interviewed the teachers afterwards to examine how Arabic is used by such teachers in English classes. He concluded that there seems to be “a tension between beliefs about what is ideal and what actually happens in the classroom” (p. 6). In other words, teachers are encouraged by the administrators to use only English, but in reality they widely use Arabic. The researcher attributed that to the weak language abilities of the students. The second study was concerned with the pedagogical methods used by teachers in English classes in colleges (Al-Jadidi, 2009). Some 15 students from different colleges were interviewed and asked about whether they prefer to be taught by bilingual teachers or monolingual teachers. Six students preferred bilingual teachers who can speak their

mother tongue (Arabic) so that they can understand English grammar more. On the other hand, six of them preferred monolingual teachers to gain native-like fluency and pronunciation, and three of the participants remained neutral.

2.6 Conclusion

Taking into account what has been presented in this chapter regarding the studies that focused on the issue of using L1 in L2 classes, there seem to be three gaps in this research area. First, most of the studies tended to examine the perceptions of L2 teachers and their actual behaviours in using L1 separately. In fact, more attention was paid to teachers' views than actual practices. This study will examine both the perceptions and the actual practices of Arab teachers of English in using Arabic in their classes. Second, in most of the studies, the level of the students was not emphasised as a factor in influencing teachers' decisions in whether L1 should be used or not, but, in this study, the focus will be clearly on teachers who teach low-proficiency students. Third, unlike most of the studies that used quantitative research methods, this study will try to adopt a qualitative approach so that the use of Arabic in beginner English classes will be explored in great detail.

The research questions that will be addressed are:

- 1) What are the declared perceptions of Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in a language centre in Oman?
- 2) How is Arabic used by Arab teachers of English in low-proficiency English classrooms in a language centre in Oman?

A crucial point that needs to be clarified at this stage is the rationale behind focusing on teachers' opinions and beliefs in this study. It can be argued strongly that experimental research is better

than observational research in providing evidence of what can be seen as an effective strategy in the classrooms. This study, however, focuses more on teachers' beliefs, opinions, as well as practices than testing the effectiveness of using L1 in L2 classrooms using an experimental design. The reason behind the emphasis on teachers' beliefs and opinions in second language classrooms comes from the research on teacher cognition and teachers' own theories of learning. Borg (2003) maintained that teaching is not only about teachers' behaviours in the classrooms; rather, the beliefs of SL teachers are crucial in suggesting effective teaching strategies. To elaborate, Wilson and Peterson (2006) stressed that language teachers are "intellectuals who think both about subject matter and students" (p. 9) and- based on their knowledge, beliefs, experiences and context,- they create and mandate their practices in the classroom to facilitate the learning process. Based on this argument, the focus of this study on the teachers' perceptions and beliefs can provide insights about whether using Arabic (L1) is an effective teaching strategy in low-proficiency English classes in the Language Centre or not.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, eight major issues will be dealt with. The study's research questions and objectives will be restated, followed by the research strategy that was adopted. Also, a description of the participants who were involved in the study will be given, followed by a detailed description of the data collection methods and the procedures. The processes used, from collecting the data and analysing it, to presenting the findings, will be briefly discussed. At the end of the chapter, an explanation of how the ethical procedures were applied will be highlighted.

3.2 Research questions and objectives

As mentioned earlier in both chapters one and two, this study was designed to answer two related research questions:

- 1) What are the declared perceptions of Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in a language centre in Oman?
- 2) How is Arabic used by Arab teachers of English in low-proficiency English classrooms in a language centre in Oman?

This study aims to clarify the place of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in the Language Centre and show the extent to which teachers at the Language Centre feel their students need Arabic in their English lessons. It is hoped that the results will provide recommendations in two main areas, the first of which is the ways in which Arabic can be

best used with beginners to facilitate their learning and the second is the policy that should be adopted regarding the use of Arabic at the Language Centre.

3.3 Research strategy

In answering the previous questions and achieving the aims set out for the study, an interpretive qualitative research approach was adopted. Such an interpretive paradigm, as Krauss (2005) stressed, “allows them [investigators] to grasp the point of view of the respondent” since it gives them a lot of space to exchange ideas through interaction and “understand the complex word of human experience and behaviour” by reflecting deeply on the views of those “involved in the situation of interest” (p. 764). As explained later in this chapter, the two data collection methods used are group interviews and observations. The combination of the two methods is in line with the interpretive approach adopted in this study since both methods can result in data rich with the respondents’ views and perceptions of their understanding of the world. In combining the two methods, it was thought wise to outline them sequentially in two different stages, starting with the interviews and concluding with the observations. As Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) stated, this sequential administration of methods is helpful in allowing the researcher to ensure the validity of the data, especially in this study, the purpose is to ensure that the participants’ actual behaviours in the classroom match their reported behaviours in the interviews since “the relationships between what respondents say they do and what they actually do is not always very strong” (Foddy & Foddy, 1994, p. 8).

3.4 Participants

The actual population of this study was 15 Arab teachers. Out of the 15 teachers, only 10 teachers (approximately 66%) showed a willingness to take part in the study, while the remaining five never responded, although they had been sent the information sheet and the consent form one week before the interviews took place. The reason for the poor response rate might have been the time of the data collection. That is, the data was collected at the same time as some social and professional events happening in the Language Centre, such as the Open Day, and some teachers were busy preparing for such events. It might be argued that the purposive sample size is relatively small in this study; however, as Sandelowski (1995) maintained, in case-oriented studies where the researcher is interested in analysing a specific context in-depth, a small sample size might be adequate. Since this study is a particular case study of a particular centre, 10 respondents is a sufficient sample size, especially since the research methods adopted are mainly qualitative, which can result in detailed and rich description of experiences and behaviours.

The final sample included 10 Arab teachers, three males and seven females, and they had had different teaching experiences. All 10 participants were interviewed, and only four of them were observed. Six of the participants had teaching experience of **between two and five years**, one participant had teaching experience of **between five and 10 years**, and three participants had teaching experience of **more than 10 years**. All of them have been teaching in the Language Centre for more than two years. It should be mentioned that all participants indicated that their students were beginners in English.

3.5 Data collection methods

Two main data collection methods were used: group interviews and classroom observations. In group interviews, researchers interview more than one participant and ask questions to get a wide range of responses.

3.5.1 Group interviews

For the interviews, two groups of five were questioned. The reason for having five teachers in each interview is to have an equal number of participants and thus a balanced discussion in each one. Since one main aim of this study was to find out the teachers' perceptions, using interviews, as maintained by Berg (2007), is an effective way in "understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events" (p. 97). The logic behind choosing group interviews over individual ones is that group interviews are quicker than individual ones, and thus it is possible to carry them out in a reasonable amount of time. Also, in social research, it is highly recommended that teachers are interviewed in groups in order to get a wide range of responses (Robson, 2011). The possibility of using focus groups instead of group interviews was raised. Focus group are group interviews in which the participants discuss a specific issue and the researcher is not actively participating or directing questions; that is, he/she has less control over the agenda of issues to be discussed (Halcomb, Oholizadeh, Digiacomo, Phillips & Davidson, 2007). It was expected that using focus groups in such a study could lead the participants' discussion to deviate from the researcher's main focus and interest (Robson, 2011). For the interviews, a semi-structured interview schedule with some probes was developed because of its flexibility in leaving space for the participants to give open and detailed responses (Barriball & While, 1994). As for the questions, the

participants were first asked about their perceptions of the use of Arabic in English classes. After that, they were asked to give examples or situations of using Arabic in their classes. The third question revolved around whether they allow their students to use Arabic in the classroom or not, followed by a question about which situations they allow them to use Arabic in. The last question aimed at eliciting the teachers' opinion on which policy should be implemented in the teaching institutions regarding the use of L1 in L2 teaching contexts (See appendix 1 for the interview schedule). The order of the questions was chosen in a way that would make the discussion move from declared perceptions to actual behaviours. There were two reasons for this. First, such an order ensures that the participants do not adapt what they say about their beliefs to match what they reported about their behaviours. Second, it has a less threatening impact on the participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2007). Most of the questions were open-ended in order to encourage the participants to explain their opinions and experiences in detail so that appropriate interpretations could be drawn during the data analysis stage.

The interview schedule was piloted one week before the actual interviews took place. The piloting was done in a private college in Muscat with five teachers, four males and one female. This private college was chosen because it has a similar context to the Language Centre, especially in that it has a lot of Arab teachers teaching foundation students. After the initial analysis of the piloting interview, one change was made to the interview schedule. The last question was changed from *“What does the policy of the Language Centre say about using Arabic in English class? Do you agree with it?”* to *“If you were the policy maker, would you allow the use of Arabic in English classes, or ban it, or leave the choice to the teachers?”* The reason for changing the question was the discomfort on the faces of the participants when the question was directed to them. As Berg and Lune (2004) stressed, participants seem to view the

indirect questions as less threatening than the direct ones. Some of them did not respond and the others gave different and conflicting answers. The real interviews were carried out one week after the piloting, and the teachers were sent the information sheet and the consent forms by emails one week before the interviews took place.

3.5.2 Classroom observations

With respect to the classroom observations, the study initially hoped to carry out five classroom observations mainly to test “the accuracy of the picture presented” in the interviews to increase the validity of the study (Mackey & Gass, 2012) because sometimes the participants’ report does not match their actions in the classroom. Only four **non-participant** observations were carried out, three of which were recorded and one was not recorded because the participant did not give her consent (it will be reflected upon in the ethical procedures). The reason for choosing a non-participant observation (where the researcher only observes rather than participates in what is going on) is that with such an observation, the researcher’s attention will be focused on the main situation to be examined (Berg & Lune, 2004). That is, the researcher will be able to capture the situations in which the observed teachers use Arabic as well as the surrounding context with full attention. The observational schedule included two types of purposes for using L1: teaching purposes and managerial purposes. Those purposes, or themes, were taken from the following studies: Cameron (2001), Levine (2003), Al-Hadhrami (2008) Al-Nofaie (2010) and Anggaraeni (2012). For the teaching purposes (e.g., *explaining new words, checking comprehension...etc*), there are four categories (reading, speaking, listening, writing) so that the purpose of using L1 can be indicated in a certain activity type. Some rows in the table were left blank in case the teachers use L1 for a new, unanticipated purpose. Also, at the end of

the schedule, some space was left so that the observer could write a general overview of the lesson. (See the appendix 2 for the observational schedule).

The piloting was also done in a private college, but no changes were made to the schedule. However, some procedural changes were noted down, such as the place where the observer should sit in the class and the way the audio-recorder should be handled by the observed teacher. In the piloting observation, the observer sat in one corner of the class where it was hard to see what the teacher was writing on the board. Therefore, in the actual observations, it was decided that the observer should sit at the back of the class. Also, in the piloting observation, the audio-recorder was placed on the observer's desk, and thus the voice was too quiet when it was played after the observation. In the actual observations, it was placed on the teacher's desk.

3.6 Analysis processes

The data was transcribed first, then coded and analysed, and finally presented into tables and charts. The transcription system used is a simplified version adapted from Jefferson (2004). The original Jefferson system includes all the symbols that indicate all sorts of conversational dynamics, from pauses to the pitch of the words. However, in the transcription stage of this study, only the following dynamics were indicated: unclear utterances, unfinished utterances, unheard utterances and question marks. As Poland (2001) argued, when the researcher is interested in getting the opinions and hearing about the participants' experiences, "close attention to conversational dynamics may be unnecessary" (p. 16). With regard to the coding, the "one-word capitalized" coding technique, which refers to assigning participants' quotes and field notes to one word or phrase written in the right-hand column, was used to analyse the data (Saldana,

2012). After the data was analysed, the themes and the sub-themes that arose were organised into tables and charts followed by a conducted description with quotations and examples.

3.7 Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, which refers to the “accuracy of the findings from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers” (Creswell, 2003, p 195), several strategies were followed. The first one was triangulation which means “the use of different methods to collect data” (Shenton, 2004). Because self-reporting does not seem to provide a full picture of the actual behaviours of the participants, this study, in addition to the group interviews, used observations to examine the issues and get a clear accurate picture. Added to that, the participants were sent the transcripts of the interviews and later a short report of the findings. This member checking procedure confirmed that what the participants reported was correctly understood by the researcher, and this contributed to the trustworthiness of the current study (Sandelowski, 1993). Finally, to ensure the credibility of the coding process, which refers to the researchers’ consistency in identifying “themes in the same data set” (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman & Marteau, 1997, p.599), another MA colleague was asked to code the first interview to identify the emerging themes. Two changes were made accordingly after discussing the themes she had found in the data.

3.8 Ethical procedures

As Bouma (2000) stressed, to involve participants in any social research, they “must be able to make a voluntary, informed decision to participate” (p. 197). Based on this, the participants in this study were sent an information sheet and a consent form one week before the interviews. They were briefed about the research aims and were informed that their participation is voluntary and they may withdraw within one week from the day of the interviews. They were also informed that the data would be anonymised and used for only research purposes. The names mentioned during the interviews were replaced with (x), so the individuals can never be identified. The same procedure was followed for the observations, except that the information sheet and the consent forms were sent five days before the observations. Three of the observations were done on the same day, and the fourth one was done three days later. The participant in the last observation did not give consent to being recorded, and thus the class was not audio-recorded. That was because in Arab culture, especially in the Gulf, females are very sensitive to being recorded or video-taped. The Arab society seems to not be oriented towards scientific research and lacks the appreciation of its value (Nakhla, 2006). It is worth saying that the consent of the students was not received since the focus of the observer was only on the teachers. In order to ensure that the voices of the students were not captured by the recorder, it was placed on the teacher’s desk so that when the teacher went to talk to the students individually, their voices would not be captured by the audio-recorder.

Chapter Four

Results and analysis

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to draw together the themes that emerged from the two data collection methods: the group interviews and the classroom observations. In order to address the two research questions, both the teachers' declared perceptions and their actual observed behaviours will be discussed under each theme. Comparing the teachers' reported behaviours and their actual behaviours under each theme can increase the credibility of the results. The themes are presented in question format.

4.2 Do the teachers use Arabic in their classes?

In response to this question, the participants reported that they use Arabic to differing degrees. Most of them gave a **sometimes** rating to the use of Arabic in their English classes, and some of them said that they **rarely** use Arabic with their students. However, nobody seemed to **not** use Arabic at all in the class. In fact, by observing the teachers using Arabic in their classes, it seems that their actual behaviours confirmed what they reported in the interviews regarding the amount of using Arabic.

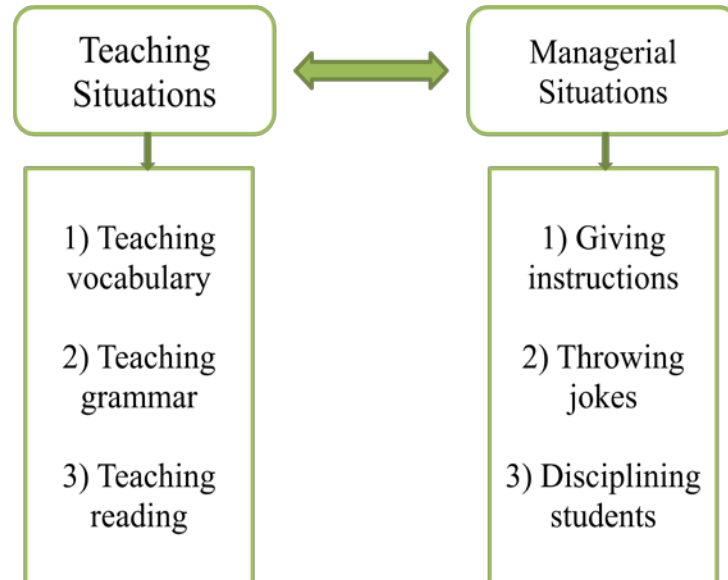
4.3 When do they use Arabic?

One question in the interview required the participants to provide examples of actual situations in which they use Arabic in their classes. Here, both the teachers' reported behaviours and their actual behaviours of using Arabic will be discussed.

4.3.1 The teachers' reported behaviours

Figure 1 summarises the situations in which Arabic is used as the participants reported during the interviews.

Figure 1: Reported situations of using Arabic



As the figure illustrates, the teachers said that they use Arabic in two types of situations: teaching situations and classroom managerial situations. With respect to the first type, three situations were given. First, most, if not all, of the participants reported that they mainly use Arabic in teaching vocabulary to the students, specifically those abstract words that cannot be explained using other strategies. As an example, one participant admitted that: *“I use it also in the vocabulary, some of the words that are abstract and cannot be represented by pictures or by acting or something like that, so it is the last option.”* (Female, two years of teaching experience).

In addition to teaching vocabulary, the second most prevalent situation indicated by the participants is using Arabic to teach English grammatical rules that are similar in Arabic. One participant said: *“Sometimes also when I explain grammar, which is similar to Arabic, I would... how do you say it in Arabic?”* One example of similar grammar was mentioned twice in the interviews which is the passive voice. For instance, one participant described:

There're some, there are also some grammar points that are very similar to Arabic, we have the same function in Arabic, I would give an example, the passive voice, it's very clear in Arabic...so instead of spending a long time to give them the idea of what's passive, I mean not the structure, but the meaning, the concept of passive, you just tell them it's in Arabic this, and you carry on talking in English, sometimes. (Male)

The third situation pointed out by the participants is using Arabic in reading texts mainly to clarify the unfamiliar cultural concepts that are new to the students. In order to simplify those foreign culture-related topics, one of the participants suggested: *“In some cases, you might have a topic which is kind of a bit foreign, although, I mean, you know so if it is, then you might feel that you need to give them doses as you said, you know, of Arabic”* (Female, 10 years of experience).

It should be noted that most of the participants stressed that they use Arabic as a last option in the teaching situations, while very few maintained that they use Arabic as a first option.

Moving to the classroom managerial situations, first, Arabic, as one participant asserted, is used in giving instructions to the students during exam times:

and instructions, it's very important especially during exam times, we really want to make sure that they know, they got the information... because we don't want them to go to the wrong you know venues, venues or you know, to the different timing, to make sure that. (Female, a programme coordinator)

Some participants reported that they sometimes use Arabic to tell jokes in the class and to allow students to have a bit of fun and humour. One participant elaborated on the types of jokes by saying: *“I comment on them, I just make fun to attract the students' attention.”* (Male).

The third situation that was mentioned in the interviews is that Arabic is used for disciplinary purposes. As the participants pinpointed, they tend to warn students in Arabic so that the students understand and take it seriously. For example, it was stated by one participant: *“...and also threatening them, warning them...of course in Arabic... because I want to make sure that they understand me.”* As the other participants commented, students take the teachers' warning much more seriously when it is in Arabic.

4.3.2 The teachers' actual behaviours

The actual behaviours of the teachers during the observations seem to confirm what was reported in the interviews regarding when the teachers resort to Arabic in their lessons. All of the observed teachers used Arabic to some extent, ranging from five times to 16 times per lesson. Also, they used it in both teaching situations and managerial situations. Some examples of how the teachers used Arabic in their actual lessons are (1) explaining new words (e.g. acting), (2) utilising students' cultural background (e.g., using Al-Eid Al-Watani translated as National Day to explain foreign concepts, such as “celebrations”) in reading texts, (3) explaining grammar (e.g., the auxiliary verbs and the indefinite articles), (4) explaining activities, (5) translating their own words (6) repeating words said by their students spontaneously (7) directing full questions in Arabic to their students. The last three situations from the previous list were not indicated in the interviews. Some instances of the managerial situations included (1) reprimanding the students and (2) telling jokes. It should be stressed that most of the teachers seemed to use

Arabic as a last resort, especially when the students could not understand what the teachers were trying to convey to them, while some of them used it as a first option.

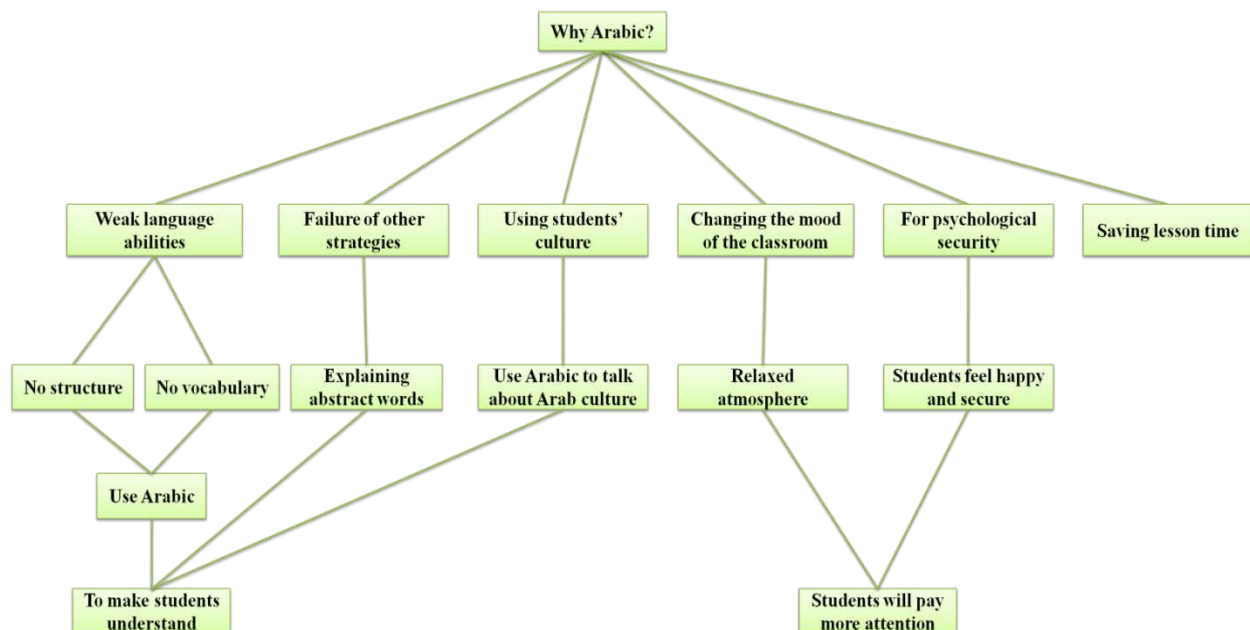
4.4 Why do they use Arabic?

Under this theme, the teachers' rationales behind their use of Arabic will be emphasised. First, the reported reasons the teachers provided during the interviews will be discussed, and then the actual contextual reasons for which they used Arabic in their lessons will be explored further.

4.4.1 The teachers' reported reasons (Interviews)

With regard to the reported reasons the participants provided for their use of Arabic in their classes, there seem to be six reasons.

Figure 1: Teachers' reasons for using Arabic



The above figure shows that there are six specific reasons the teachers indicated for their use of Arabic in their low-proficiency classes, and each of the reasons comes down to achieving one of

the two following purposes: to make students understand, or to make them pay more attention during the lessons. The first reason mentioned was the weak language abilities of the students. One participant elaborated more on it by saying: *“It is to do with their language abilities, they don't have the vocabulary”* (Female). As the participant stressed, the students’ weak language abilities that push her to use Arabic with her students are their lack of adequate vocabulary and correct structure.

The second reason, as the participants pointed out, is the fact that sometimes the other teaching strategies they try in the class in order to explain to their students fail to make them understand, so they resort to using Arabic. For example, one participant maintained: *“In very rare cases where the words are abstract and I've used all the ways to explain but I feel like they don't work, then I might say the meaning in Arabic”* (Male).

The third reported reason for using Arabic is resorting the students’ cultural background to “localize” the foreign unfamiliar topics of the target language. Doing that in the reading texts demands teachers to use Arabic in those situations. For instance, it was reported:

The text is really difficult for them and you try your best to localize it, then you need to use their culture, and in order to use the culture, sometimes, eh, you need to translate, you need to use Arabic, I'm not sure how we can deal with that.

(Female, five years of experience)

As the participant implied, using the Arab culture to familiarize students with the new topics requires them to use Arabic, or bits of Arabic.

The three reasons mentioned above, as most of the participants indicated, come down to achieving one general purpose behind using Arabic, which is simply to make students understand in the classroom.

Other participants agreed that they sometimes use Arabic to change the mood of the class and have fun with their students. That is to say, they use Arabic to make students laugh and create a relaxed atmosphere. One participant explained:

I use it to your surprise to throw jokes, to change the mood in the class, and I think it really works...so I would use words that relate to their lives, especially they're teens, and I know what words that make them laugh or to crack the joke with so this is one of the ways I would use Arabic with.

(Female)

Another reason given by some participants is that they use Arabic to make students psychologically secure. That is, they believe that students seem to feel happy and secure when their teachers use Arabic in the class. One participant contended that: *"Psychologically it makes them more secure, they feel more secure when you use Arabic."* When asked to reflect on the two reasons, the participants reported that when students laugh and feel psychologically secure, they will pay more attention to the teacher, and this can be seen clearly in one of the participant's statements: *"To change the mood, to change the routine, to bring them back to focus an attention to the class, I do use Arabic."*

The last reason mentioned in the interviews is that teachers sometimes use Arabic to save the class's time because when the students are really weak in English, the use of other strategies might take longer. One participant stressed:

Sometimes, for example, I explain a word in English, it takes too long and it's still they don't get it...so I have to say the word in Arabic... saving time and also it's

easier for them, ok, I'd, I would go on and on explaining, giving examples on the board or something...and then, they were still looking at me giving me that look, so I just say it in Arabic.

(Female, 10 years of experience)

4.4.2 The actual contextual reasons (Observations)

By analysing the contexts surrounding the situations in which the teachers used Arabic in their lessons, the teachers' reported reasons for using Arabic seemed to go in line with their actual uses of it. The most prevalent reason why the teachers used Arabic in their lessons was to make the students understand. In most of the situations of explaining words, explaining grammar, explaining activities, translating teachers' words and directing questions, the teachers used Arabic as a last option to ensure that their students understood. One example is that when one of the teachers was trying to explain auxiliary verbs, the students seemed very confused at the beginning, so the teacher resorted to Arabic to make it easier for them. There was one situation in which one of the teachers repeated a word in Arabic said by a student. The reason might have been that the teacher wanted the rest of the students to hear the word, a reason which was not mentioned in the interviews. Regarding the situations of telling jokes, it is possible that the teachers did it to make their students pay more attention and stay awake during the class. For instance, in one of the lessons, a group of students were talking at the back, and the teachers commented on their behaviour in a funny way to bring them back to the lesson. It is not possible, however, to sort out the situations in which the teachers used Arabic to make the student **psychologically secure** since it would be necessary to conduct stimulated recall interviews, which were not done in this study.

4.5 Do the teachers allow their students to use Arabic?

In the interviews, the participants were asked whether or not they permit their students to use or even speak in Arabic in the class and how they react towards their students if they start speaking in Arabic. First, what the teachers reported will be presented and what actually happened in the lessons will be elaborated later.

4.5.1 What was reported...

Half of the participants declared that they do not allow their students to use or speak in Arabic in the class. One participant explained: *“We're using it for a purpose, I mean there is a reason why we're doing it, because we're teaching and they're not really, you know, they're not in that position.”* Some participants responded that they cannot stop their students from speaking in Arabic, while other participants said that they sometimes do not mind if their students speak in Arabic. For example, one of the participants said he does not mind if his students use Arabic while doing the tasks with their friends as long as they speak in English to the teacher after doing the task. He elaborated:

if they're doing a matching activity, words and definitions, ok, and they're talking in Arabic, in here and there, to to say that this is a and this is, one is a and two is b, you know, if you notice, if you notice the teacher while going around, they would be, they would be using English in a way, they should speak to, to the teacher in English ,only English, but Arabic, you know, to, to expre- to tell their friends what's the correct answer, so you know, in this case only, I wouldn't mind.

(Male)

Similarly, another participant said that she allows her students to speak in Arabic in order to explain to each other in their small groups what to do on a certain task. She described: *“I give*

them some time to discuss the task in Arabic so that they help each other, discuss it, understand it and then it's time for English” (Female).

The teachers who do not allow the students to use Arabic at all generally gave three main reasons, the first of which is that students do not have adequate exposure to English outside the classroom and the only chance to practice speaking English is inside the classroom. Another reason brought up is that if the teachers allow the students to use Arabic, the students might misunderstand and end up using it all the time. She explained: *“Because I know they will use it, in all cases, they will use it with their friends.”* The third reason highlighted is that by banning the students from using Arabic, the teacher is challenging them and preparing them for the higher levels.

4.5.2 What actually happened...

Although half of the teachers admitted that they do not allow their students to speak in Arabic, what happened during the observations was a bit different from what was reported in the interviews. To explain further, when it came to the actual lessons, it was noted that the normal teachers’ reaction towards their students when they used Arabic was to ignore them and sometimes repeat what students said, as indicated earlier. Only one teacher seemed to be strict when his students tried to speak in Arabic. He would stop and them. Examples will not be provided here since the consent of the students to report their utterances and behaviours was not asked for because the focus of this study is mainly on teachers’ practices.

4.6 What policy should be implemented regarding the use of Arabic?

The participants, in the last question of the interview, were asked to give their views on the policy that should be implemented with regard to the use of Arabic in the Language Centre. All of the participants, except one, preferred to leave the issue of whether to use Arabic in the class or not to the teachers. In justifying their choice, the participants seemed to agree that teachers can judge for themselves depending on the situation. For instance, one participant explained: *“At that level, like if you're teaching a beginner class, eh, you can tell and you can judge for yourself whether you need to use the first language or you don't”* (Female, 8 years spent working in the Language Centre). The same participant indicated that in the Language Centre, there is no written policy.

However, one participant contended that he would like to see English as the only language used by both teachers and students. He assumed that if the teacher gives even a little opportunity for Arabic to be used in the classroom, the students would start to talk in Arabic all the time.

However, the same participant admitted that he did use Arabic in rare situations.

Chapter Five

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the major findings of the study and will compare them to the studies included in the literature review. An attempt will be made to provide plausible interpretations of these findings and explore what the results mean for the teaching context in the Language Centre.

5.2 When Arabic?

There seem to be two types of situations in which the teachers use Arabic: teaching situations and managerial situations. Based on what the participants reported in the interviews, Arabic appears to be used in teaching vocabulary, grammar and explaining foreign culture-related concepts in reading texts. In the observations, all of these situations were apparent with some new situations emerging, such as (1) asking long questions which can be hard for the students to understand, (2) explaining activities, (3) repeating words that a student said in Arabic to ensure that everybody can hear them and (4) translating words that teachers use in spontaneous speech. As some participants argued, the reason why teachers use Arabic in these situations is “to make sure they [students] understand.” However, in the case of repeating a word said by students in Arabic to the whole class, the teacher could have asked the student to say it herself to her peers, but the teacher preferred to say it himself probably to save time. Considering the non-teaching situations, Arabic seems to be used mainly to tell jokes; obviously to change the mood of the class. It is also used to give instructions and discipline the students. Teachers may prefer to give important instructions, such as for exams, in Arabic to make sure that the students never miss

this important information, and this was pointed out in the second interview. Some of the participants appear to warn and threaten their students in Arabic, which could be imputed to the fact that the students may take it much more seriously when it is in their native language.

Comparing the findings of this study, especially with regard to the actual uses of L1 in L2 classes, to the previous research, there seem to be both consistency and inconsistency. First, this study confirms the actual uses of Arabic found in the studies of Cook (2001), Levine (2003), Al-Hadhrami (2008), Mouhanna (2009) and Anggraeni (2012), which are discussed earlier in the literature review chapter. On the other hand, it does match with Cameron's (2001) suggested guidelines of using L1 to chat with the students and correct their mistakes. He was probably referring to a different context- probably a context of very young learners, not adults.

5.2 Why Arabic?

The findings of this study showed that Arabic is seen as a positive teaching tool in the context of low-level classes in the Language Centre. Almost all of the teachers appeared to use it to different degrees, ranging from rarely to sometimes. This amount of using L1 in L2 classes is in a close accord with what the study of Kovacic and Kirinic (2011) found regarding the amount of using Croatian in English classes, which also seems to be in line with what researchers, such as Harmer (2001) suggested regarding keeping the use of L1 to a minimum. It is worth saying that nobody in this study seemed **not** to use Arabic at all, and this is actually expected, partially because of the very low levels of language abilities of those students coming from high schools. Some of the justifications provided by the teachers for using Arabic; for example, students' weak language abilities and making students feel psychologically secure, are highlighted in some of the studies discussed earlier in the literature review (e.g, Al Sharaeai, 2012; Vaddapalli & Al-

Bainy, 2012; Schweers, 1999). The teachers also gave three reasons for using L1 in L2 classes that are not touched upon by the studies cited in this thesis; for instance, changing the mood of the class, using students' culture, and saving the class's time. The first reason, changing the mood of the class, could be seen as a way to make students comfortable and reduce their anxiety in learning a foreign language, especially when students find themselves in mixed-gender classes following their single-sex school education. This point is consistent with the findings of some studies done on language learning anxiety; for example, Timor (2012) and Maclyntyre and Gardener (1989). The first study was conducted on 112 Israeli school teachers and found out that using L1 is useful in reducing the learning anxiety of those who have learning difficulties. The later study focused on communicative anxiety which some learners experience in the process of learning another language and suggested that using L1 might reduce such anxiety.

As this study suggested, using the students' culture to explain new concepts and ideas, especially in reading texts, pushes teachers to use Arabic because, as the participants stressed, language and culture cannot be separated and using the Arab culture needs to be accompanied with using the Arabic language in the classroom (Jiang, 2000). Another reason indicated by the participants is the need to use Arabic to save time, which is mentioned in several studies (e.g, Wang & Wen, 2002; Harbord, 1992). This can be attributed to the fact that in some classes, the attention of the teacher is drawn to a specific language skill or item, so any new issue raised by the students which could slow down the pace of the class is dealt with in a quick way.

5.4 Do teachers allow their students to use Arabic?

Whether students are or are not allowed to use Arabic in their English classes is part of how teachers perceive the use of Arabic in their classes. This study showed that half of the teachers do not allow their students to use Arabic; some of them cannot stop the students, and some do not mind in certain situations. The rationale behind not allowing the students to use Arabic in the classroom, as the findings suggest, centres around three main justifications, the first of which is that students need as much exposure as possible to English because they do not practice English outside the classrooms. The second reason is that when students are given the green light to use Arabic, they would take it as a habit and use it all the time. The third reason, as this study found out, is that teachers seek to challenge their students and prepare them for the higher levels where they are taught by non-Arabic speaking teachers, so they find the foundation programme a suitable place to get their students accustomed to using only English in their classes.

This study has also found that teachers sometimes cannot stop their students from using Arabic in the classroom. Although the participants did not explain this point in detail, it can be suggested that due to the influence of high school education in Oman in which Arabic, as Al-Hadhrami (2008) contended, is widely used in English classes, students are used to speaking in Arabic. What is interesting is that some teachers' reactions towards whether their students can or cannot use Arabic depends on the person the students are talking to. That is, they can use it among themselves, but they have to use only English when they talk to the teacher. This might be explained by the fact that the teachers want to develop the students' confidence in using the target language, especially when they communicate with proficient speakers.

5.5 Teachers' views towards policy

It is clear from the findings that there is no written policy in the Language Centre concerning the use of Arabic in the English classes. The teachers in this study seemed to be convinced that if there is a policy to be made in this regard, it should state that the teachers should decide when to use Arabic. As one participant indicated, a plausible explanation for their choice might be that there is a wide range of individual difference in the classes, and sometimes teachers use Arabic in certain situations when needed and refrain from using it in other situations. Therefore, the choice should be left to them. Only one participant expressed a concern regarding leaving the choice to the teachers, believing that the students might habitually end up using Arabic and forgetting about English in the classroom, so he preferred to have an English-only policy.

5.5 What do the results mean for the teaching context in the Language Centre?

Reflecting on the findings of the current study, several suggestions could be forwarded and incorporated into the teaching context of the Language Centre. As explained before, the results of this piece of research could add to the teachers' own theories of language learning which can, in turn, suggest some effective teaching strategies and guidelines. As the study suggests, when it is used wisely by the teachers, Arabic seems to be a useful resource in teaching low-proficiency students. Teachers need to maximise the opportunities for learners to practice English inside the classrooms and reduce the amount of using Arabic. They can reduce the amount of Arabic by resorting to it as a last resort in certain **teaching** situations. In such situations, Arabic can be employed to various degrees, and the teachers can decide on those degrees themselves. Using

Arabic here can help students understand more and reduce their anxiety as well. However, in managerial situations such as disciplining the students, there does not seem to be any harm in using Arabic as much as needed to help students understand the teacher's message. It is also recommended that if there is a policy to be written in the future, the administration of the Language Centre should leave the teachers to decide when and how Arabic is used in the classrooms.

Chapter six

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the declared perceptions of the teachers of the Language Centre towards the place of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes and focus the attention on how these teachers use it as a supportive teaching tool. In order to address this issue, a qualitative and interpretive research approach was adopted using group interviews and classroom observations. The interviews were helpful in providing in-depth discussions about how Arabic is viewed in low-level classes, while the observations were basically chosen to confirm the reality of what was reported in the interviews. In the previous chapters, an attempt was made to tackle the issue from various aspects so that the research questions could be addressed thoroughly. A review of literature was provided with some recent relevant studies considering the use of L1 in L2 classes, and a detailed description of data collection methods with the procedures was given. Following that, in chapters four and five, the data was analysed and the key findings were provided.

A close look at the findings suggests that the teachers of the Language Centre generally view Arabic as a supportive learning tool in teaching beginning students, provided that it is used in appropriate situations when it is actually needed. In these appropriate situations, Arabic is mostly used as a last resort; that is, after the teacher has used all different strategies to explain a particular language item, but the students did not get it. Hence, using Arabic is recommended here to make students understand. This study also highlighted the situations in which the teachers of the Language Centre appear to use Arabic. As indicated in the previous chapter, Arabic is not only used for teaching purposes; rather, it is also used for other non-teaching and managerial purposes. Drawing on the observations carried out, the most frequent situation in which Arabic

seems to be used is teaching grammatical structures that are similar in both English and Arabic. Regarding the non-teaching purposes, telling jokes and having a bit of humour in the classroom is the most frequent non-teaching situation in which Arabic seems to be used. What is surprising in the findings is that although the teachers perceive Arabic as a supportive teaching tool in the classroom, they view it negatively when used by the students. They seem to believe that the teachers use it for a purpose, but when the students use it, there will be some negative consequences, such as missing exposure opportunities and forming habits of using Arabic all the time. This view can be found in the behavioural perspective of the language learning theories where L1 “should not be used in the classroom because it is thought that it will interfere with the students' attempts to master the target language” (Nazary, 2008, p. 142). With respect to the policy towards the use of Arabic in the Language Centre, there seems to be no mention of a written policy, but if there is to be one, the teachers would like to be given the choice whether to use it or not

Although the findings of this study are useful, several limitations need to be acknowledged. First, although the study tried to contextualise the issue by selecting beginner classes, it did not attempt to contextualise the focus of the issue, such as choosing one specific skill (e.g., grammar) to examine how Arabic is used. Also, no stimulated recall interviews were carried out after the observation, which could have resulted in much more accuracy in identifying the purpose of using Arabic in certain situations. Another limitation lies within the number of participants and the observations, which was a result of the ongoing social events during the period of data collection in the Language Centre. Focusing on teachers only without shedding light on the students' views can be considered another limitation because in any teaching context, it is always better to take account of all the human subjects involved in the situation being researched.

It should be noted that this issue needs to be studied further, but with more focus on one particular skill, especially grammar as a teaching purpose or telling jokes as a non-teaching purpose because these purposes seem to be frequent. If there is a policy to be written in the future in the Language Centre regarding the use of Arabic, the choice should be left to the teachers to decide. It is important to mention that for novice teachers, it is recommended that they test the effectiveness of those strategies suggested to them by senior teachers before taking them for granted. What works for some classes might not work for others.

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Appendices

Appendix one: Interview schedule

An interview schedule

General research area

The use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classrooms

Research questions

- 3) What are the declared perceptions of the Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in the Language Centre?
- 4) How is Arabic used by the Arab teachers of English in low-proficiency English classrooms in the Language Centre?

Opening

- My name is Matasam Al-Raaisi. I am a teacher of English in the Language Centre. Currently, I am an MA student at the university of York, UK. I am doing my dissertation on exploring the perceptions of Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in the Language Centre.
- I would like to ask you some questions about your perceptions and your practices in your classes so that I can have better understanding of the topic I am investigating. You can ask me for clarification if any question seems ambiguous to you. First, I would like you sign this form which assures you that no names will be revealed under any condition and the information you will provide will only be used for the sake of research.
- The interview will take no more than 20 minutes, is that fine with you?
- **General information about the participants: (This will be given on a separate sheet of paper to be completed by the participants).**

- **Actual behaviours and the underlying rationale of using Arabic**

1. How often do you use Arabic in your classes: never, rarely, sometimes, usually, always?
Why?
 - Are there any other reasons you can think of?
 - What do you mean by that?

2. When do you use Arabic in your classes? Why do you use it in these situations?
 - Are there any other situations you can think of?
 - Can you give me an example?

3. Do you allow your students to use Arabic? Why, why not?
 - Would you elaborate on that?

4. In what situations do you allow them to use it?
 - How do you feel about that?
 - Can you think of any other situations?

5. What does the policy of the Language Centre say about using Arabic in the classrooms?
 - Could you say more about that?

6. Do you agree with it? Why, why not?

Closing

- I appreciate the time you have spent for this interview. Is there anything you would like to say before we conclude?
- I should have all the information I need here. I will send you a transcript of our interview as soon as possible. Is it alright if I approach you again in case I need a clarification on something you have said so that I will not misunderstand or misinterpret what you have said? Thanks again. I will send you a report of the analysis.

Appendix two: Observational schedule

Observational Schedule

- **Aim:** Capturing the situations in which the teacher uses Arabic in his/her low-proficiency English classes.

Date:	Place:	Length of the lesson:
-------	--------	-----------------------

	Focus of the activity			
	Reading	Writing	speaking	Listening
<u>Purposes of using Arabic</u>				
A) Teaching purposes				
Explaining new words				
Explaining bits of grammar				
Translating sentences				
Checking comprehension				
Explain activities				
Giving feedback (error correction)				
Asking questions				
Answering students' questions				
Explaining learning strategies				

B) Managerial purposes				
For greeting				
For discipline purposes				
Chatting with the pupils				
Making jokes				

General overview: (main phases, main types of activities...etc)

Note: The themes in the table above have been taken from the following:

(Cameron, 2001; Levine, 2003; Al-Hadhrami, 2008; Al-Nofaie, 2010 & Anggaraeni, 2012)

Appendix three: Participant consent forms

Using Arabic in English classrooms: A study of teachers' perceptions and practices

Matasam Al-Raaisi, Department of Education, University of York

Supervisor: Dr Zoe Handley, Department of Education, University of York

Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form: Group Interview

Introduction

My name is Matasam Al-Raaisi. I am a teacher of English in the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University. Currently, I am doing my MA in *Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching* at the University of York, UK. I am conducting a study on exploring the perceptions of Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in the Language Centre. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, concerning your perceptions and your practices of using Arabic in your classes so that I can have better understanding of the topic I am investigating.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my study, I will conduct a group interview with you which will involve questions about your perceptions and practices of using Arabic in your low-proficiency English classes. It might last about 20 to 25 minutes. If you permit me, I will audio-record and take notes during the interview. The recording will be transcribed and anonymised later. You will have a chance to comment on the transcript of the interview. If you decide not to continue at any point during the interview, you may stop me at any time.

Benefits

It should be mentioned that there is not direct benefit from participating in the study. However, the study might be of interest to you as an Arab teacher of English since it sheds light on how Arab teachers use Arabic in their low-level classes as a supportive tool. You can gain insights about the situations in which Arabic can be used in the classrooms. After the analysis, you will be sent a report of the findings.

Confidentiality

The data will be handled confidentially and any information of individual names or personal information will not be revealed under any conditions. The data will be transcribed and anonymized before passing it to any other one and it will be stored in a password protected file. The anonymised data will be used for my MA dissertation and any other publication or presentation I do in the future. It will be archived and used for future research purposes. In case the results of the study are published or presented, individual names and any identifiable information will not be used. With regard to the recordings, I will keep them in a password-protected file until I have graduated, and then they will be deleted.

Rights

Your participation in my study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw within one week from the day on which the interview takes place. If you choose to withdraw, there is no penalty imposed on you. If you have any questions about the study, feel free to contact me. I can be reached at mrar500@york.ac.uk, and if you have any serious concerns or complaints against the conduct of my study or your treatment as a research participant, you may contact my supervisor at zoe.handley@york.ac.uk or the Chair of the Ethics Committee: Dr Emma Marsden at emma.marsden@york.ac.uk. After the analysis of the data, you will be sent a general report of the findings.

Approval of the study

The study has been reviewed and approved by my supervisor, Dr Zoe Handley.

Consent

I have read and understood the information provided about the study above. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and I can draw at any point I wish. I agree to take part in this study.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Using Arabic in English classrooms: A study of teachers' perceptions and practices

Matasam Al-Raaisi, Department of Education, University of York

Supervisor: Dr Zoe Handley, Department of Education, University of York

Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form: Classroom observation

Introduction

My name is Matasam Al-Raaisi. I am a teacher of English in the Language Centre at Sultan Qaboos University. Currently, I am doing my MA in *Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching* at the University of York, UK. I am conducting a study on exploring the perceptions of Arab teachers of English towards the use of Arabic in low-proficiency English classes in the Language Centre. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, concerning your perceptions and your practices of using Arabic in your classes so that I can have better understanding of the topic I am investigating.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my study, I will observe one of your English lessons to see how you use Arabic to support the learning of your students. If you permit me, I will audio-record and take notes during the observation. No video-recording will be used. The recording will be transcribed and anonymised later. You will have a chance to comment on the transcript. If you get uncomfortable during the observation, you may notify me and I will immediately leave your class.

If there is a need for added clarification in the future, I will contact you by e-mail to request that.

Benefits

It should be mentioned that there is not direct benefit from participating in the study. However, the study might be of interest to you as an Arab teacher of English since it sheds light on how Arab teachers use Arabic in their low-level classes to as a supportive tool. You can gain insights about the situations in which Arabic can be used in the classrooms. After the analysis, you will be sent a report of the findings.

Confidentiality

The data will be handled confidentially and any information of individual names or personal information will not be revealed under any conditions. The data will be transcribed and anonymized before passing it to any other one and it will be stored in a password protected file. The anonymised data will be used for my MA dissertation and any other publication or presentation I do in the future. It will be archived and used for future research purposes. In case the results of the study are published or presented, individual names and any identifiable information will not be used. With regard to the recordings, I will keep them in a password-protected file until I have graduated, and then they will be deleted.

Rights

Your participation in my study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw within one week from the day on which the observation takes place. If you choose to withdraw, there is no penalty imposed on you. If you have any questions about the study, feel free to contact me. I can be reached at mrar500@york.ac.uk, and if you have any serious concerns or complaints against the conduct of my study or your treatment as a research participant, you may contact my supervisor at zoe.handley@york.ac.uk or the Chair of the Ethics Committee: Dr Emma Marsden at emma.marsden@york.ac.uk. After the analysis of the data, you will be sent a general report of the findings.

Consent

I have read and understood the information provided about the study above. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and I can draw at any point I wish. I agree to take part in this study.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix Four: Example of coded analysis

Interviews			
Participants statements	Theme	Code	Code's meaning
"I use it to your surprise to throw jokes, to change the mood in the class, and I think it really works, because the students come with really eh, no comprehension of the target language"	Reasons for using Arabic in the classroom	TJ	Throwing a joke
"and they come with the eh, the, the, not only the Arab language but the Arab culture too, and then maybe, the, the text is not localized, it's not eh, so you need to"	Reasons for using Arabic in the classroom	USC	Using students' culture
"and psychologically it makes them more secure, they feel more secure when you use Arabic"	Reasons for using Arabic in the classroom	PS	Psychological security
"at times when I'm teaching vocabulary, I am trying my best to explain the word, then, I give them examples and I might draw something, but they still don't understand it"	Situations of using Arabic	TV	Teaching vocabulary
"and sometimes also when I explain grammar, which is similar to Arabic, I would"	Situations of using Arabic	TG	Teaching grammar
"I don't think you can eh, stop your, your students from using"	Students' use of Arabic	DNSS	Doesn't stop students

Arabic because it is, it is their comfort zone”			
“yeh, I tell them please don't speak in Arabic, try to say it in English, so they really try their best to what, to explain things”	Students’ use of Arabic	DSS	Does stop students
I mean, if you want, if you want at least like, if you, if you want to have some sort of policy, then you would actually say that it's up to teachers	Policy of using Arabic	LLT	Leave it to the teachers
Observations			
Participants’ actual use of Arabic	Purpose of using Arabic	Code	Code’s meaning
“The people are comfortable, مرتاحين”	Teaching purpose	TV	Teaching vocabulary
“خلاص أو خصاب” translated as “are you finished? Or do you want some dates”	Non-teaching purpose	TJ	Throwing a joke
“فعل متعدي وغير متعدي” translated as “transitive and intransitive verbs”	Teaching purpose	TG	Teaching grammar
“It’s like عيد الأضحى” translated as The Muslim second Eid”	Teaching purpose	USC	Using students’ culture to explain a foreign topic

Appendix Four: Analysis Tables

Table 1: Teachers' responses to using Arabic

Participants	Gender	Using Arabic or not?	How often?
A	Male	Yes	Rarely
B	Female	Yes	Sometimes
C	Male	Yes	Sometimes
D	Female	Yes	Rarely
E	Male	Yes	Rarely
F	Female	Yes	Sometimes
G	Female	Yes	Sometimes
H	Female	Yes	Sometimes
I	Female	Yes	Sometimes
J	Female	Yes	Sometimes

Table 2: Participant A's actual use of Arabic

Who?	Participant A
Based on what was said in the interviews, how often does the teacher use Arabic?	rarely
How many times did he use Arabic in the observed class?	16 times
Purposes of Using Arabic?	10 times: joking
	3 times: explaining words
	2 times: using students' culture to explain new concepts
	1 time: Asking a question
More teaching or more non-teaching situations?	More non-teaching situations

Table 3: Participant **B**'s actual use of Arabic

Who?	Participant B
Based on what was said in the interviews, how often does the teacher use Arabic?	sometimes
How many times did she use Arabic in the observed class?	5 times
Purposes of Using Arabic?	3 times: explaining new words
	2 times: repeating a word said by a student
More teaching or more non-teaching situations?	More teaching situations

Table 4: Participant **H**'s actual use of Arabic

Who?	Participant H
Based on what was said in the interviews, how often does the teacher use Arabic?	sometimes
How many times did she use Arabic in the observed class?	8 times
Purposes of Using Arabic?	4 times: making jokes
	2 times: explaining bits of grammar
	1 time: explaining activities
	1 time: disciplining the students
More teaching or more non-teaching situations?	Almost equal

Table 5: Participant C's actual use of Arabic

Who?	Participant C
Based on what was said in the interviews, how often does the teacher use Arabic?	rarely
How many times did she use Arabic in the observed class?	11 times
Purposes of Using Arabic?	6 times: explaining bits of grammar
	2 times: translating words he used in his sentences
	2 times: disciplining the students
	1 time: making jokes
More teaching or more non-teaching situations?	More teaching situations

Table 2: Teachers' reactions to students' use of Arabic

Teachers' reactions	Participants
I can't stop them	E & B
I don't mind sometimes	A & F
I don't allow them	C, G, H, I & G
No response	D

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