Students' perspectives on the use of L1 in English classrooms

by

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ABSTRACT

The current study looks into the reasons and perspectives students have about the use of their first language in English classrooms. It analyzes their opinions on different issues connected to first language use. The analysis for this paper was conducted on data from an online survey and follow-up interviews based on 51 total participants. The results showed that students used their first language for a variety of reasons. The amount of first language used also differed. The results also showed that patterns emerged when considering the participants’ language backgrounds, age, and the English language proficiency level. The results of this study will help teachers and students understand the reasons students have for using their first language in English classrooms. By knowing these reasons, students may be able to eliminate them and eventually improve the English language learning process. Teachers can also use the results to modify their classroom management to reduce the amount and frequency for first language use. To sum up, the research showed that students have a variety of reasons for and opinions about why they use their first language in their English classrooms, and that usage may be affected by a number of variables that need further research and study.

Key words: first language, perspectives, reasons, attitudes, L1.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In order for people to feel connected to their cultures and homes, they try hard to stay connected with their mother tongues. Holding on to the first language is sort of holding on to your own culture. As both an English student and teacher, I have seen the phenomenon of holding on to ones’ first language so many times that I decided I wanted to go deeper into that idea. As either a student or a teacher, I have faced students and colleagues who spoke Arabic even though they were in an English class. When attempting to ask about the reasons behind that action, many times I was answered with “Because this is my mother tongue. I am not an English speaker.” I was surprised by the attitude of some of my students, classmates and colleagues who were trying hard to hold on to their first language even when trying to learn English. It raised my attention to the whole question of why they speak their first languages while trying to learn English at the same time. In this paper, I explore students’ opinions and habits regarding their use of first language when they are in an English classroom, a place where English is supposed to be spoken.

Before going directly into investigating and analyzing students’ opinions and habits regarding first language use, we will look at how the first language has been perceived and handled throughout history in English classroom settings. We will go through some of the teaching methods that either encouraged or discouraged the use of the first language in classrooms. Then we will examine bilingual education and how it affected first language use. Finally, we will have a deeper and more expanded discussion on the idea of English-Only policy in the United States.
Language Teaching Methods:

Throughout history, many English language-teaching methods have developed. Some were in favor of using first languages and some were not. One of the first English language teaching methods that highly encouraged and depended heavily on the use of first language was The Grammar Translation Method. Diane Larsen-Freeman (1986) went into a detailed description of this method and other teaching methods in her book *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. She pointed out how the teacher in her class depended heavily on translations from English to Spanish. All the vocabulary and texts that were taught during class were instantly translated into the first language. All the communications and interactions between students and teacher were almost entirely in Spanish. Instructions were given in the first language as well. Students’ success was measured depending on how good they were in translating from English to Spanish and vice versa.

This method had been used for centuries before teachers and educators started to think of using different methods. However, in many countries, teachers still use this method to teach English. Personally, I have had teachers who used the Grammar Translation Method during school. Growing up in a school where teachers used The Grammar Translation Method, students felt attached and inclined to use their first language rather than using English when in the classroom.

Along with the huge spread of the Grammar Translation Method to teach English in many countries, other methods developed. Some of these methods almost forbade the use of the first language. One of the methods that did not allow students to use their first
language was the Direct Method. In this method students were taught using visuals and direct connections between the language and what it implies. The first language was not used at all in the classroom. Other methods such as Audio-Lingualism, the Silent Way and Communicative Language Teaching did not encourage the use of the first language, but accepted it whenever it was needed to facilitate language learning. Generally, throughout history there have been methods that encouraged teachers and students to use the first language and some that did not allow it. As a result, both teachers and students followed different principles to address this issue. Not having one opinion on how to address it has made it even more confusing to the students to either use it or not as they come through different teachers who either encourage or prohibit it. In this paper, we will see what students’ opinions are on the use of the first language.

Many of the previous methods dealt with English teaching in settings in which students learned English as a foreign language. However, English education in the United States has had a different approach. As students need to learn English in order to use it on a daily basis either in school or outside, there has been a bigger need for them to learn English faster and better. However, with the huge number of immigrants who do not speak English as a first language, American education has had to come up with different solutions to handle the increasing number of non-speaking English immigrants that kept coming to the United States. They started what was later known as “Bilingual Education.”
Bilingual Education:

One of the first steps that the United States took to deal with the new immigrants was the Bilingual Education policy. Baker (2011) defines bilingualism as the ability to speak one language fluently while speaking another language less fluently. He also defines it as the knowledge of more than one language. The beginning of bilingualism started with the development of the civil rights and people’s call for equality in opportunities in education (Baker, 2011). Students had the chance to study the same subjects in school either in English or in their first languages. It was due to the increase in the number of Spanish-speaking population in the 1960s in Florida that some schools started what is now known as bilingual education (Keller & Van Hooft, 1982). Students studied different subjects using Spanish from grade three to grade twelve. As a result of this new movement, many other schools around the United States also started adopting the Spanish-English bilingual education. The level of using Spanish differed in different schools and different classrooms. Some of these schools adopted bilingual education in which students were allowed to study either in English or Spanish. In other schools, teachers used Spanish to facilitate English instructions and communications with the students. The Civil Rights Act in 1964 by President Johnson gave public schools the ability and funding to start bilingual education and develop materials and textbooks that helped improve bilingual education throughout the United States (Lapati, 1975).

Ovando (2003) talked about how bilingual education took different forms, of which immersion education was one. In immersion education, students learn a language that is different from their first language, either English or any other language. In
immersion schools an equal number of English speaking students and non-English speaking students study together in order to learn each other’s languages. Padilla, Fairchild, and Valadez (1990) mentioned some of the problems that arose with the use of bilingual education in American schools. They talked about how previous research showed that bilingual education did not help raise the degree of education among the students who were enrolled in bilingual programs. They also addressed how bilingual education altogether was challenged by the English-Only policy that perceived bilingual education as a threat to the Americanization notion that had developed at that time.

Donna Christian (1994) pointed out some additional issues connected to bilingual education in the United States in her article “Two-Way Bilingual Education: Students learning via two languages.” First, there was the cost to support these bilingual programs. Schools needed teachers who were bilinguals and were able to communicate and teach in two languages. They also needed curriculum built in two languages. Another issue was that speakers of different languages other than Spanish started to ask for their own languages included in bilingual programs. The United States tried to change from using bilingual education to moving to English as a Second Language classes (ESL) to deal with speakers of other languages. With this movement, a new issue was raised. Was it still OK to use the students’ first language? Research at this point showed that the learners’ first language was considered a hindrance to English language learning; as a result, education policy came up with the “English-Only” policy to prevent students from using their first languages in English classrooms and limit all the communications and interactions to English only.
English Only Policy:

After bilingual education was introduced into the United States, the House of Representatives passed a law making English the official language of the government. English was considered to be the language that would unify the people in the United States into one nation. Some people supported this policy while others were against it and each party had their own reasons. The supporters believed that by speaking one language around the States, people would be more unified and able to communicate. Opponents, on the other hand, believed that choosing English as the official language in the United States contradicted one of the grounding principles of freedom in the United States, which is the freedom to speak your language, and be connected to your own culture (Hartman, 2003).

The idea of using English only in classes was supported by the common notion in the United States in the early twentieth century about “Americanism” (Kloss, 1977). People in the United States tried to force public schools into teaching in English only. They tried to unite the different races and ethnic minorities in the United States into speaking one language. The government issued several laws against the use of any languages other than English in formal means of communication. However, schools went back to teaching using other languages after World War II (Kloss, 1977).

Supporters of the English-only policy tried to find other ways to help the non-English speakers mingle in the English speaking community. To fulfill that goal, they replaced bilingual education and classes with ESL classes. Different schools and different states had their own policies and rules for ESL classes. ESL students took ESL classes
ranging from one year to a number of years before joining the school’s mainstream classes (Hartman, 2003).

Citrin, Reingold, Walters, and Green (1990) claimed that throughout history, there has been a typical change in the languages of the immigrants to the US. The first generation of the immigrants came in using only their first languages. The second generation was bilingual using English in addition to their first languages while most of the third generation spoke only English. That natural language development supported the English only movement in the US in general and in education in particular.

Giroux (2001) presents the same idea shown in Hartman (2003), that Americans started the English-only movement in order to reduce the threat coming from outside with the increasing number of immigrants coming to the US. Both majority and minority linguistic groups in the US felt threatened by each other. The English-speaking majority felt threatened by the increasing number of immigrants who did not speak English and started the bilingual education. This could have led to the US having two or three official languages or even more. The minority groups felt threatened by the English-only movement as it had the potential to eliminate their language and limit its use to personal interactions among its speakers.

As teachers and students were required to use English only in the classroom, it became obvious that students could only speak English in all the interactions in the classroom (Kloss, 1977). However, in spite of these laws preventing teachers and students from using their first languages in ESL classes, first languages have been and still are spoken in almost all ESL classrooms around the United States. This situation demands an analysis of the reasons and opinions of students about why they keep using
their first languages even if classroom rules and education laws did not allow them to do that. Why and when students use their first languages?

**First Language Use in ESL Classrooms:**

There has been a lot of research done in the area of first language use in English classrooms by many researchers and language teachers. Most of this research has studied teachers’ opinions about the use of native language in the classroom or the frequency of that usage. There have not been many studies exploring students’ perspectives and reasons for using their first language when they are trying to learn English in English language classrooms.

Vivian Cook (2001) discussed the different ways in which first language (L1) can be positively used in the foreign language classrooms. He looked at the arguments that second language (L2) teachers and linguists have about this topic. He argued that L1 and L2 have two different linguistic systems and characteristics. As a result, students should reduce their use of the L1 in order to fully acquire the L2. Although teachers keep telling students to separate the two languages, learners keep comparing the two linguistic systems as they learn the L2. For that reason, teachers usually encourage students to avoid using the L1 or comparing the two languages. Also, students need as much exposure as possible to the second or target language in order to acquire it. That requires them to use the L2 as much as possible.
Cook also compared acquisition processes of the two languages. When learners learned their first language, they did not use another language to acquire it. Consequently, they should only use the L2 in order to acquire the second language and to reach a level of competency that is close to their level in their first language.

He concluded by pointing out some teaching contexts in which the first language can be positively used. Teachers and students can use the first language for a number of reasons such as:

- Explaining and checking meaning
- Explaining and teaching grammar
- Class management
- Explaining class activities and tasks
- Maintaining contact with the students

Charlene Polio and Patricia Duff (1994) looked at the use of the first language in English classrooms from a different point of view. They looked at the teachers’ usage of English as a first language in foreign language classrooms in the US at the university level. They came up with similar results to Cook’s about the different reasons for using L1 in L2 classrooms. They listed a number of possible usages for English as a first language in the foreign language classrooms such as:

- Classroom management
- Explaining grammar
- Explaining and checking vocabulary
- Building rapport between students and teachers
- Explaining ambiguous and difficult concepts
The most obvious reason for using English in the foreign language contexts as found by Polio and Duff was to negotiate meaning.

Elsa Auerbach (1993) carried out a detailed study on the concept of using English only in the English language classroom. She looked at the two different views of that topic: to either use it or avoid it. She tracked the English-Only movement through history and provided the justifications and reasoning behind that movement. She offered the following justifications for using L1 in the L2 classrooms:

- Students who are unable to participate in English only programs will have an opportunity to study using both their L1 and L2.
- Using L1 reduces barriers to language learning and develops rapport between teachers and students and between the students themselves.
- It is found that students who are allowed to use L1 had acquired L2 faster than students who used only L2 in their classrooms.

Auerbach concluded by saying that although there are two points of view to this topic, it is the teachers who ultimately decide whether they need to use the L1 or not. Every classroom is unique and for that reason, the teacher is the best judge to decide whether to use the L1 or to avoid it.

Whereas the previous studies looked at the use of L1 from the teachers’ points of view, other researchers tried to look at it from the students’ points of view. William Schweers (1999) carried out a study to investigate the reasons and amount of L1 usage in the English classrooms. He investigated the use of Spanish in English classes in the University of Puerto Rico.
Schweers’s study found out that about 88.7 percent of the students thought Spanish should be used while all the teachers thought Spanish should be used. This shows a difference between how the two perceive L1 usage in the classroom. However, none of the students thought the teachers should stop using Spanish in the classroom. Most of the teachers and the students agreed that Spanish should be used to explain difficult concepts while the least number of students and teachers agreed that they did not really need Spanish for testing. However, about 6.4 percent of the students thought they did.

In addition, most of the students thought Spanish should be used about 30 percent of the class time while 1.1 percent thought that 90 percent of class time should be in Spanish. About 68.3 percent of the students mentioned that they use Spanish in the English classrooms in order not to feel lost. As we have seen from Schweers’ study, there is a difference between what students think and what teachers think.

Another study by Carolina Rodrigues and Gina Oxbrow (2008) looked at the students’ beliefs of whether the use of the L1 in English classrooms is a facilitator or a hindrance. The study found out that most of the students said that the use of L1 (Spanish) in the English classroom actually helped them improve their L2. Most of the students agreed that they preferred if the teachers explained the grammar points in their L1 and not in the L2. However, it was not preferred for the teachers to give instructions or carry out activities in the L1. They also preferred for the teacher to point out the similarities and differences between their native language and the L2 they are learning.
As we have seen in the studies above, most students to some extent agree with the use of the L1 for a number of reasons. This paper will examine the reasons for these preferences and not only what students think is best for them.

**Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to give deeper insight into why English language students use their mother tongue in their English classrooms instead of using English. It will look at non-native English students’ perspectives and attitudes on their usage of their first language in their English language classrooms. It will explore their thoughts and possible reasons for not trying to use English only and instead using their first languages. The results will help students themselves have a better idea and explanation of their attitudes towards language learning. By realizing their own justifications, they may have a better chance to develop their language skills.

The study will also help teachers and educators understand why their students tend to use their first languages instead of English in English language classrooms. The results may also help teachers understand in which contexts their students tend to prefer to use their mother tongue and not English. By understanding that, teachers will be better informed about which materials and methods may help their students use English effectively in their classrooms. This may lead to the eventual improvement of the students’ English language skills by using English only in the classrooms.
Questions of the study:

This paper will try to answer the following questions:

1. What reasons do non-native English students have for using their mother tongue in the English classroom?
   i. In what contexts do non-native English students tend to use their mother tongue in the English classroom?
   ii. How often do non-native English students use their first language in the English classroom?

2. What do students think of the teachers' use of the first language in the English classroom?
   i. What do students think about the connections between classroom management and their use of their first language in the English classrooms?

3. How do students perceive the connection between the language they use outside classroom and their use of mother tongue in the English classroom?
   i. How do students see the connection between motivation to learn English and their use of English in the language classroom?
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The use of the first language in the English classroom has been and will remain an issue that everyone has an opinion about. Some teachers and students are against the use of first language and have their own reasons. Others are for it and also have their own reasons and justifications. In this section of the paper, we will look at some of the studies that have been conducted to investigate the use of the first language in English classrooms.

As we will see in the list of resources in the outline below, most of the studies conducted looked at first language use in general or the teachers' use and perceptions of using the first language in English classrooms. Not many studies have been conducted on the students' beliefs about their own use of the first language in their classrooms. Even the studies that focused on both the students and the teachers as research participants mostly addressed the teachers' ideas and beliefs.

In addition, most of the studies conducted about the use of the first language in English classrooms were conducted in EFL settings and very few were conducted in ESL settings. Because of this, this thesis tries to cast a deeper look into the students and their views about their own usage of the first language in English classrooms.

This literature review will be organized into three main parts. In the first section, I will review some key studies that examined the use of the first language. In the second section, I will examine teachers' attitudes towards first language use in the English classroom. The third section will look at six recent studies that examined students' attitudes towards first language use. Within each of these sections, I will describe the
types of participants in each study, the main results including significant and surprising results, the justifications for using the first language as claimed in the studies and the amount of first language use in each. I will also include a discussion of the students’ and teachers’ comments and first language use in English classroom, and the different factors affecting the amount and purpose of using the first language, such as for personal preferences and language learning.

The use of first language:

Studies discussing the use of the mother tongue in general have usually tried to list the pros and cons of using the mother tongue in English class without a direct reference to a certain language or taking a specific point of view. These types of papers usually included a historic overview of other studies that had been done in the same area, and provided an analysis of their results and possible interpretations. One of the most important papers that was considered a very valuable reference in first language use is Vivian Cook's (2001) *Using the First Language in the Classroom*.

In his paper, Cook discussed the different arguments that were in favor of using first language in class. He argued against the common belief that second language acquisition should be treated like first language acquisition in the sense that no other languages should interfere with the acquisition of this second language. Cook pointed out that language learners differ in that they are more mature and more able to make connections and analyze language use. Therefore, the technique they use is different from the techniques they used when learning their first language which might also include applying their first language to help them learn the second language.
Cook also argued that although teachers try their best to separate the first language from the second language in their teaching by trying to use a number of techniques such as miming or drawing examples to teach their students, learners will usually make connections between the vocabulary, syntax, and phonology of their first and second languages in their own minds. As a result, even if the teachers tried to separate the two languages, learners would still refer to them and connect them in their minds.

Cook pointed out a number of ways that teachers can positively incorporate the first language into second language learning. Teaching new vocabulary and checking the meaning of this new vocabulary were key uses for the first language. Many teachers use the first language to convey meaning and check the meaning of new words with their students. The first language could also be used to teach explicit grammar rules to students to help them get a better understanding of these grammar rules. He argued that first language use might save time and effort for teachers if it does not dominate classroom interaction. To help us gain a better understanding of the opinions of the students regarding first language use in the English classroom, we will analyze their reasons and opinions in details in this paper.

Bouangeune (2009) conducted a study on the use of the first language in Laos to improve the students’ English learning. He used two groups, an experimental group and a control group, to conduct his study. The first language was used as a means of instruction and to translate new words and vocabulary for the experimental group while the control group did not receive first language instruction and translation. The results showed that the experimental group showed a higher improvement in English than the
control group. Bouangeune attributed this improvement to the effective use of first language instructions and accurate translations of the new words and vocabulary.

Kovacic and Kirinic (2011) investigated teachers’ and students’ perceptions towards using Croatian in English for specific purposes (ESP) classrooms. They looked deeper into the idea of whether the first language should be used in English classrooms or whether it should be avoided. The study analyzed the first language utterances in terms of necessity, frequency, usefulness, and appropriateness. Students and teachers agreed that the first language could be used moderately in English classroom to serve certain learning purposes. However, there were some differences in opinion between the teachers and the students regarding the situations in which the first language could be used. About 56.1 percent of students participating in this study reported that they sometimes preferred to use Croatian while only 45 percent of the teachers reported the same answer.

Also, about 50.9 percent of the students in the Kovacic and Kirinic study reported that they preferred their teachers to use the first language moderately in English class. Regarding the usefulness of using first language, about 73.1 percent of the students and 80 percent of the teachers believed that using Croatian is both important and useful to enhance students’ English learning. The study revealed that most participants agreed that the first language use is more important in explaining grammar points, difficult concepts, and ideas and speaking activities these findings align with the results of other studies described in this paper. The previous studies did not try to analyze the students’ perceptions about first language use thoroughly. For that reason, in this paper, we will try to explore these perceptions in greater depth.
Glenn Levine (2003) conducted a study based on an online questionnaire about the attitudes of university students and instructors regarding the use of the first and the target language. His participants were first and second year students of French, German, and Spanish. All the participants were either native speakers of English or bilingual speakers. The study found out that teachers and students usually used the first language to discuss class assignments, course policies, and for class management. Also, the first language was used to explain grammar in FL (Foreign Language) classrooms. Levine claimed that the target language was usually used for activities within the course book while the first language was often used when discussing topics that were not connected to classroom activities. This study shows that first language use and purpose is similar across different languages and not only when English is taught as a second or foreign language.

Another significant finding in Levine's study was the degree of anxiety connected to target language use among students. Participants showed a higher degree of anxiety as the amount of target language used in class was increased. The study concluded by claiming that the first language has an important role in target language learning, and that teachers need to find ways to incorporate the first language and use it effectively in the classroom. Although this study looked at the students’ opinions about first language use in the target language classroom, it looked at the students who spoke English as their first language and not at English language learners. The current study analyzes the students’ opinions about using their first languages in English classrooms.

Tang (2002) conducted a study similar to the previous studies about teachers and students’ attitudes towards the use of first language in English classrooms in Chinese
schools. He also investigated the frequency of first language use in English classrooms. He used classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews for the data collection process. He found that the highest amount of first language use was to explain the meaning of new words, and the lowest was to explain grammar rules. The teachers claimed that using the first language saved time and was more effective in explaining new vocabulary. Over 70 percent of students and teachers who participated in the study thought Chinese should be used in the English classrooms. Most of the students believed that the first language should be used to explain grammar points while most of the teachers believed it should be used to practice the use of new phrases and expressions. Also, about 69 percent of the students said that the first language helped them learn English a little. Moreover, most of them thought that the first language should be used for about five percent of the class time.

**Teachers’ Attitudes towards L1 in Different Languages:**

Many studies have looked at the teachers’ use of the first language in class and the different views and justifications the teachers had for using the first language. La Campa and Nassaji (2009) conducted a study on German as a foreign language in Canada. The classes of two instructors were videotaped and audio-recorded trying to capture the moments in which the instructors used the first language and assess the reasons for using the first language. The authors found a number of reasons why the two instructors used English rather than German.

Translation of vocabulary from German to English was one of the most common uses for the first language and also to check the meaning of new words. The first
language was also used to compare the two languages. Giving instructions and classroom management was often carried out in English rather than in German. Personal comments and interactions between the teachers and the students also took place in English rather than in German. The study found was that instructors used words that were connected to the first language culture in the first language rather than in the second language. When an idea is connected to the students' own culture, they used the first language to talk about it rather than the second language. The researchers found that about 11.3 percent of the instructors' utterances were made in English and not in German. The experienced teacher used fewer first language utterances than the novice teacher did. The study found out that some of the teachers realized some of the justifications for using the first language but did not realize some other reasons for their usage of the first language.

Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) conducted a study to investigate the effect of the use of Persian in EFL classrooms in Iran. They looked at the amount of the first language use in English classes. They compared two classes in which the two teachers used different teaching methods. The first teacher depended on Grammar-Translation Method and therefore heavily relied on translation to the first language. The second teacher used group work and other audio and video teaching aids; use of the first language was remarkably lower than the amount of the first language used by the first teacher. The teachers stated that the type of textbooks and English education in Iranian schools, in addition to the lack of time and parents' concerns about their children's success rather than education, were major factors that forced them to use the first language to help
students achieve better grades rather than trying to teach them how to use English in a communicative style.

Al-Buraiki (2008) conducted a study on teachers’ attitudes towards the use of the first language in English classrooms. Her results were similar to the studies above. Teachers mainly indicated that they used the first language to give instructions and explain new concepts and vocabulary. Most of the teachers who participated in the study agreed that using the first language can facilitate English language learning and enhance students’ language proficiency. They claimed that using the first language saves valuable class time trying to explain concepts that can easily be explained through the first language translation.

Al-Hadhrami (2008) investigated the use of Arabic among English teachers and how it affects English learning. He collected his data through interviews and classroom observations. The study found results that were similar to those of the previous studies. Teachers mainly used the first language to translate new ideas, concepts, and vocabulary. They also used the first language to give instructions and for classroom management.

Daniel Krieger (2005) talked about the use of the first language among English language teachers in both ESL and EFL settings. He claimed that using the first language in a multilingual classroom gives the students the notion that English is not the main means of interaction in the classroom. It also gives students the idea that they can use their first language for their own needs and not just to facilitate English language learning. In the EFL setting, he believed that students use their first language whether the teachers allow them to do that or not. However, he also believed that the teacher
should try his/her best to help the students use their first language to enhance their language learning process and not deprive them of the chance to learn English. The teachers should set the rules from the beginning for when and how students use the first language and when they are not allowed to do so. But what about the students’ beliefs regarding first language use?

Kim and Petraki (2009) looked at the teachers’ attitudes towards the use of the first language in a Korean school in Vietnam. The researchers used observations, interviews, and questionnaires to collect the data. They found that native English-speaking teachers thought that using the first language is sometimes useful while Korean-speaking teachers found it to be often useful. The degree to which the two types viewed the usefulness of the first language use is what marked the difference. The study showed that the Korean-speaking teachers used first languages in class more than English-speaking teachers did. These results supported the view that English-speaking teachers tend to use the first language less than non-native English teachers do. Teachers and students in this study agreed that the basic use of the first language in English classes is to explain the meaning of new words and expressions, classroom management and grammar explanation.

Yin Lin (2005) addressed the teachers’ use of the first language and how it can affect students’ attitudes and use of the first language as well. The author found that the study’s participants believed that using English only with non-English majors is not as important as using it with English majors. Teachers thought it was OK to use the first language when teaching non-English major students. Teachers used different types of first language utterances ranging from whole sentences to single words. The teachers’
amount of the first language use also depended on the level of the students. With young learners, the teachers used the first language more than they did with university students.

Huang (2006) investigated students’ attitudes towards first language use in a writing class in Chaoyang University in Taiwan. Huang found that students thought the teachers should use the first language to explain grammar for them to better understand. Students also thought that the first language use should not exceed 25 percent of class time and that English should be used for most of the class time. They also preferred that their teachers use the first language for brainstorming ideas and explaining difficult ideas and concepts. Participants in this study felt that if the teachers used the first language more often in the classroom, their chances to listen and use English would be fewer.

Hidayati (2012) conducted a study on the use of Bahasa Indonesian. The author observed English for general purposes classes that taught grammar, TOEFL and English presentation. The study aimed at finding out whether or not using the first language to teach receptive skills would enhance students’ participation and understanding in the English classroom. The teachers who were observed in this study used about 30 percent to 49 percent of total class time using the first language and between 2 percent to 8 percent of class time using both first and target languages. However, about 36 percent of the students thought that the first language should be used for about 30 percent of class time.

Hidayati’s research also found that when the teachers used a higher amount of the first language, the degree of student interaction was higher than when the teachers
used less of the first language. Students claimed that their interaction was higher when
the first language was used because they felt less lost during class, and that with a
familiar language, they were better able to understand, communicate, and participate
during class. The situations in which the teachers used the first language were similar to
the situations in the previous studies. The teachers used the first language to explain
difficult vocabulary, grammar points, classroom instructions, and social interaction
among teachers and students on topics not connected to classroom activities. However,
the study indicated that there were some instances of first language overuse among
teachers when English was a better choice than the first language such as when giving
instructions for activities and warm-up activities.

Andrea Koucka (2007) conducted a study on the use of the mother tongue in EFL
classrooms. She looked at the number of times and reasons why trainee teachers used
the first language in English classrooms. She found that some of the trainee teachers
overused the first language in their classes. The amount of first language use ranged
from no utterances to 79 per class. The teachers used the first language in a total of
fourteen situations in the classroom from introducing the objective of the lesson to
evaluating and giving feedback. That indicated that the first language was used
throughout class time.

In Koucka’s study, the highest amounts of first language use were when giving
instructions and translating vocabulary and new words. Asking questions as well as
introducing activities also generated a high frequency of first language use. In addition,
the results of this study indicated that about 64 percent of the total use of the first
language was not done effectively and that other teaching techniques could have been
used instead of the first language. We will now look at studies that discussed first language use from the point of view of the students.

**Students’ Attitudes towards Using L1 in Different Languages:**

Although students’ views about the use of the first language in English classrooms are very valuable, they have not been discussed much. When dealt with, the discussion was usually in connection to the viewpoints of the teachers. For example, Sharma (2006) conducted a study on the use of the Nepali language in Nepal’s secondary schools. The author looked at the frequency of first language use and the attitudes of teachers and students towards the use of the first language. Sharma found that teachers used Nepali to explain new concepts and vocabulary, to give instructions to activities, and to explain grammar rules. Students used Nepali more than the teachers did for various reasons, especially to explain new vocabulary and grammar rules.

In spite of the high percentage of first language use among students (ranging from 64-52%) and teachers (ranging from 42-35%), only one percent of the total number of students said that they wished the teachers would use Nepali a lot in class. The results of the questionnaire seemed to be contradicting. For example, about 62 percent of the students said that Nepali should be used in class while 16 percent said that the teacher should not use Nepali in class and 43 percent said Nepali could be used a little. Furthermore, 46 percent of the students thought that Nepali should be used in about five percent of the class time. Although the students preferred a small amount of Nepali use in class, they seemed to use it a lot more often than they wished.
Khati (2011) conducted a study on the use of the first language in English classes. The results of this study were similar to the results of the study conducted by Sharma. The paper also claimed that first language use in English medium classes helped the students improve both their language acquisition and their comprehension of other subjects and not only English. The author believed that students should be able to use their first language when they need to, as this could be a facilitator to learning rather than a hindrance. Although those studies were valuable, they did not contain much information about the reasons behind the different attitudes the students had. In the current study, first language use and attitudes will be analyzed in regard to different issues connected to first language use such as age and language proficiency level.

Alshammari (2011) conducted a study on the use of Arabic in college level EFL classes. The results of this study were similar to the results of the study conducted by Sharma. Students (61%) and teachers (69%) believed that Arabic should be used in English classrooms. What can be noticed here is that the percentage of teachers who preferred the use of Arabic in the EFL classrooms was higher than the percentage of students who did. About 54 percent of the students said that Arabic should be used to explain new vocabulary while only five percent thought that the first language should be used to give instructions. The majority of the teachers believed that Arabic should be used to explain new ideas and concepts but not new words and vocabulary. Saudi teachers had a common belief with about 60 percent of the teachers agreeing that using Arabic reduced the time consumed in class. What was interesting was that about 21 percent of the participants believed Arabic should always be used in English classrooms.
In the study conducted by Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011), both low and high level students agreed that the English language and not their first language should dominate English classroom interaction. On the contrary, the results of the study conducted by Afzal (2012) on the effect of the first language on passive and active vocabulary contradicted what the students believed about the use of the first language. Results showed that providing Persian equivalents in addition to the English definitions helped the students acquire the new vocabulary and add the words to their active vocabulary rather than to their passive vocabulary.

The results of the study conducted by Nazary (2008) aligned with results from previous studies concerning the students’ perceptions of first language use among Iranian university students. It showed that students did not prefer to use their mother tongue in English class. Only 13 percent of the participants used the first language in pair and group work. Students in different English language proficiency level reported different attitudes towards first language use. In spite of the students’ preference of the English language as the language of interaction in class, about 72 percent of the participants preferred to have a teacher who spoke their first language.

Saito and Ebsworth (2004) investigated the attitudes towards first language use in English classes among Japanese students. The EFL students in this study believed that using the first language was beneficial to them. For this reason, most of the EFL students preferred to be taught by Japanese teachers who could speak and understand their first language and would be able to explain ideas and vocabulary in Japanese. The students were also surprised when English native speaking teachers did not allow them to use Japanese in class.
In general, we have seen through these studies that although there has been a reasonable amount of research on first language use in English classes, less research has been done to investigate the students’ own perceptions of the first language use in these contexts. Furthermore, even fewer studies have been done to look at this topic in an ESL setting rather than in an EFL setting. As a result, the current study hopes to shed more light on students’ reasons for and attitudes about using the first language in ESL classrooms.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The collection and analysis for the data gathered using the survey and interview questions took a number of steps. The first step was to select the study participants. The next step was to prepare the materials that would help answer the study questions and fulfill the purpose of the study. The last step was to plan the steps to analyze the collected data from the participants using the online survey and interviews. The following chart shows the processes taken from the material preparation to the end of the analysis and discussion.

Figure 1 the methods of creating, collecting and analyzing data

In order to reach the stage of data analysis, it was first necessary to identify participants for the current study. After that, the materials to needed for data collection
were created. The study had two forms of data, an online survey and follow-up interviews. After the data were collected, a detailed analysis was conducted. The following pages detail that procedure.

**Participants:**

As the study looked at the perspectives of English learners, the participants in the study were strictly English learners either in the present time or in the past. There were fifty-one participants in the online survey but only forty-six completed the first part of the online questionnaire while only forty-four completed the second part of the online survey. The participants were from different linguistic backgrounds and English proficiency levels. They were also from different majors at the large university they were attending in the Midwest. Most were in the Engineering and English Departments. Any English learner who had taken English classes was a potential participant in the survey. Tables 1 and 2 below show the number of participants from each language background and their proficiency levels.

*Table 1 Different first language backgrounds of the online survey participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th># of participants who started the survey</th>
<th># of participants complete part 1</th>
<th># of participants who complete part 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The age of the participants in the online survey ranged from eighteen to forty-nine. The participants were divided into three age groups except for the participant who was forty-nine. That participant completed only the personal information part in the online survey that included first language, nationality, age, specialization, and English proficiency levels.
language proficiency level but he/she did not finish parts 1 or 2 of the survey, and as a result was excluded from the data analysis when analyzing the results in relation to age differences. Table 3 below shows the three age groups of the participants in the online survey.

Table 3 the number of participants in the three age groups in the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th># of participants who started the survey</th>
<th># of participants who completed part 1</th>
<th># of participants who completed part 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Group 1 (18-21)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group 2 (22-27)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group 3 (28-40)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After several blanket emails requesting interview and survey participants, five survey participants agreed to do face-to-face interviews. After emailing all of them, one was available to do an interview early during the data collection process. The second person who agreed to participate in an interview was also contacted via email and cell phone. She agreed to meet in a public place but did not show up for the interview and left the town the next day. The other three participants did not respond to the emails that were sent requesting further information about a time and place for meeting.

Because of the lack of participants for face-to-face interviews, other methods of finding participants were carried out, such as convenience sampling based on ease of contact and matching the research criteria. Three previous graduate school classmates
who were available at the time and fit the requirements of the study volunteered to participate. After filling them in on the purpose of the study, they agreed to be interviewed about their perceptions. The interview questions for them may or may not have been new, as it is unknown whether all the three participants had participated in the online survey. Only the first participant was interviewed when he/she provided an email address to be interviewed when completing the online survey.

After these graduate students agreed to participate, they asked if I could send them a reminder about the topic of the survey. I soon sent them a reminder email and asked for a time and place to carry out the interviews. It is important when conducting a face-to-face interview to conduct it in a place and time that makes the participant feel most comfortable (Creswell, 2009). The four interviews in this study were held either in the participants’ offices or in the computer lab of the building that all participants were familiar with. Two of the graduate students were from the Master’s program of TESOL/Applied Linguistics and the other two were in the PhD program in Applied Linguistics/Technology. The two Master’s students were females and the two PhD students were males and were teacher assistants in the university’s English department. All the participants were judged to have an advanced level of English language proficiency based on their status in the department and their performance in graduate programs.

One of the female graduate students participated in the survey early on and was contacted through the email address she submitted, as noted above. It is unknown whether the other three participants filled out the online survey, and given that the questions were similar, their participation in both did not impact on the findings of this study.
The four interviewees were from four different countries and spoke very different first languages. The first participant in the interviews was an Arabic speaker from Iraq. The second was a Mandarin speaker from China. The third was a Korean speaker from South Korea and the fourth and last was a Kurdish speaker from Turkey. Table 4 below shows the four participants and the basic information about each participant.

*Table 4* the participants in the face-to-face interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First language</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department</strong></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree</strong></td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Teacher Assistant</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Teacher Assistant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instruments:**

Materials used for studies usually depend on the questions of each study. Researchers try to develop surveys that help them reach conclusions. The types of questions also need to be appropriate for the desired participants. Taking into consideration the participants’ age, gender, available time to collect results, and other factors, researchers try to build surveys that best serve their purposes (Fink, 2009). All surveys need a title to give the participants an idea of the topic that will be discussed in
the survey. They also require a short description of the purpose of the survey and what kind of results will be concluded based on that survey (Creswell, 2009).

The current study contained two sets of materials in two phases. Phase one was an online survey containing two parts (see appendix for the survey questions). The first part of the survey addressed ten reasons students had for using first language in English classrooms. Participants were asked to rate how often each reason applied to them. In other words, they were asked to decide how often they used their first language in the different situations provided in the survey: always, usually, sometimes, or never. The second part of the online survey contained ten attitudes about first language use in the English classroom. The participants were asked to decide to which degree they agreed or disagreed with the opinions presented.

The questions asked in the online survey surfaced from two sources. The first source was the literature review conducted prior to starting the study. These studies dealt with and listed various reasons, opinions, and attitudes of participants. The synthesis of the information from these studies revealed a list of most common responses, which formed the basis of the current survey instrument. The second source was students, classmates and colleagues, who were informally polled about their reasons for using the first language and their opinions about the first language use in the English classrooms. This polling was done face-to-face and online. Survey items were chosen that did not reflect the information gleaned from previous research but were felt to be potentially relevant to the study. Table 5 below shows the source for each question asked in the online survey. The resources from the literature review are referred to using the name(s) of the author(s) and date of publication while the reasons and
opinions gathered from students, classmates and colleagues are referred to using the phrase *human source*.

**Table 5** the sources of the questions in the online survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I am explaining a new point in the lesson to a classmate.</td>
<td>Polio and Duff (1994)</td>
<td>In English class, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language.</td>
<td>Nazary (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I want to chat with my classmates about topics that may not be connected to class.</td>
<td>Cook (2001)</td>
<td>I would prefer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English class.</td>
<td>Human source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I need to ask a classmate to explain a point in the lesson for me.</td>
<td>Polio and Duff (1994)</td>
<td>I think my English class should have an &quot;English Only Policy.&quot; (This means only English is allowed in the English classroom.)</td>
<td>Lin (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I need to check the meaning of a new word or concept during the lesson.</td>
<td>Cook (2001)</td>
<td>As my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English class.</td>
<td>Human source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I cannot think of the correct word in English when talking to my classmates</td>
<td>Human source</td>
<td>I want to be able to speak my first language in English class when I feel I need to.</td>
<td>Khati (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because my classmates start talking to me in my first language while we are working on a task</td>
<td>Cook (2001)</td>
<td>It's not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.</td>
<td>Krieger (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language during English class when I talk about personal things with my classmates.</td>
<td>Polio and Duff (1994)</td>
<td>Using dictionaries and resources in the first language should be allowed in English class.</td>
<td>Human source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In English class, I speak my first language with other members of my group who speak my first language because we want to finish class activities faster.</td>
<td>Human source</td>
<td>Speaking my first language with my classmates between and during class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.</td>
<td>Krieger (2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A draft of these reasons and opinions using Microsoft Word application was created and discussed with the MA program committee. After talking about each point, new points were added and some were deleted from the first draft in order to collect specific and relevant information that would help answer the questions of the study. The online survey was then created and sent for approval to the committee members. The questions in the study were not presented in any way that would necessitate the participants responding to them in a particular order. In other words, each question was built to be answered solely depending on the content of that question (Fink, 2009).

After getting approval from the committee members regarding the two parts of the survey, the online survey was created using Survey Monkey website formatting. The website allows up to one hundred responses per survey. Using the basic features of the website, which include creating multiple-choice questions, rating and open-ended questions, and the online survey was created using the same materials previously approved by the committee members. The website also provides final calculations and percentages for each question in the two parts. The use of the website helped provide a
high degree of anonymity as one of the major concerns of most survey participants is the possibility of being identified (Fink, 2009).

The use of surveys to collect data is a common data collection method in research. Nowadays, online surveys are spreading due to easy access to a large number of participants, adding new features to the process of creating surveys and the high degree of anonymity in online surveys. Surveys are used in different research fields and not only in education (Andrews, Nonnecke & Preece, 2003). The use of online surveys makes it easy for the researcher to reach a larger number of participants than what would be possible using paper surveys, as he/she would need to reach the participants physically. Most online surveys are also known to reduce financial costs for conducting surveys. The use of online surveys also makes it easier for the participants to complete them whenever they have time, which helps getting more stable results (Evans and Mathur, 2005). Using online surveys also helps the researchers work on more than one thing at the same time. For example, as the data are being collected using the website, the researcher can do other tasks. Using online survey does not save time for the respondents only but for the researcher him/herself (Wright, 2005).

The second phase of this study was follow-up-interviews (see the appendix for the interview questions). Participants were asked to provide their first language and information about how long they have studied English. There were a total of eight questions in the interview. The questions contained the same topics discussed in the online survey. They were re-worded and written in questions format to be used in a face-to-face interview with the aim of looking more deeply into the same topics discussed in the online survey. The points discussed in the interviews provided
information for the qualitative discussion of the study. They provided the points of view of the participants and provided more details about the use of first language in English classrooms. Using interviews helps build a connection between the researcher and the participants, which helps get a clearer and deeper insight into the participants’ ideas and responses. It also allows the researcher to ask questions and make connections (Creswell, 2009).

Conducting interviews is the oldest method of collecting data in research (De Leeuw, 2005). Using face-to-face interviews helps reduce any errors in the online surveys that may occur if participants do not pay attention to the questions of the survey. With face-to-face interviews, both interviewer and interviewees need to pay attention to the questions to answer them appropriately. De Leeuw (1992) also talked about non-response possibilities in written surveys that do not happen in face-to-face interviews. In other words, using face-to-face interviews assures that the researcher has answers to almost all the questions he/she is asking. De Leeuw claimed that using multiple methods to collect data reduces the costs of the data collection procedures. As a result, both online surveys and face-to-face interviews were used to collect the data used for the current study.

**Data Collection Procedures:**

The study went through a number of steps during data collection. The first step was to send an email to the director of the university’s intensive English program and orientation asking her to forward it to the teachers and students in that program (see appendix for a copy of the email).
committee, we had many opportunities to talk about the ability to forward my email to the students who would like to participate in the online survey. I emailed her after the presentation with formal letter addressed to her requesting her permission to forward the email to the students. The email contained a brief description of the purpose of the study and what the participants were required to do. It also contained the consent form for the participants and a link to the online survey. If a participant agreed to complete the survey, he/she would click on the link that would take him/her to the online survey. If recipients chose not to participate in the survey, they could just ignore the email. Participants could withdraw from the study at any point.

A few weeks after sending the survey to the students in the English program, it became obvious that the number of participants had not reached the desirable number set at 50 participants. Because of this, I contacted the directors of the ESL remedial English program at the university and asked them if I could contact the teachers in this program to ask if they would encourage their students to participate in the online survey. I contacted the teachers to tell them about the online survey and asked for their help in forwarding it to their students. I also sent a mass email to all the graduate and undergraduate students in the university’s English department asking if they might participate in the survey. I ensured in the email that only non-native English speakers who have taken English classes as a second or foreign language and who were either current or former students at this Midwestern university could participate in the survey.

Once they had finished the survey, participants were asked if they would agree to participate in a follow-up face-to-face interview with the researcher. If the subjects agreed to the follow-up interview, they were asked to provide their contact information
to be contacted in order to set up a time and place for the face-to-face interviews. The participants were given a written consent form on the day of the interview to assure their full acceptance to participate (see appendix for a copy of the written consent form). They were still able to drop from the interview at any point. The interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder. The interviews were then transcribed and assigned a code number. Names and emails of the participants were deleted from the written files when referring to them in the study.

Data Analysis:

The data in this study were divided into different categories in order to answer the questions presented in the first chapter of the study. There were three major questions to answer. The first question asked about the frequency of the participants’ use of the first language in different situations; therefore, a table was built to show how often they used the first language in each situation. The contents of the table were analyzed and compared. After analyzing the participants’ answers to part one of the online survey, a similar analysis was conducted for the second part of the survey, which looked at the attitudes of the participants regarding issues related to first language use in English classrooms.

After that, a detailed discussion and analysis of part two of the online survey was conducted to answer the second research question. The second question asked about the participants’ views of the teachers’ and classmates’ use of first language in the
classroom. A table was created to analyze part two of the online survey and to answer the second question of the study.

The third question of the study was answered using the face-to-face interview data. An analysis of the participants’ answers was conducted and quotes from their answers were used to illustrate their answers and attitudes. The third question asked about the connections between the language used outside the classroom and the language used in the English classroom. No tables were created for that part of the study.

After answering the three main questions of the study, an analysis was conducted to find how the answers of the participants differed according to their first languages, ages, and English language proficiency levels. Tables were created to show the participants’ answer to parts one and two of the online survey depending on first language differences, age, and language level. All these tables are presented in the results and discussion chapter.

The means (M) was calculated for some of the tables in the analysis. Means were calculated to help the reader interpret how the participants responded and offer a way to compare their responses. The use of means also helped to draw conclusions about the participants’ reasons and opinions about the first language use in the ESL classrooms. The means were calculated using a number of steps. The first step was giving a value for each answer in the two parts of the survey. Table 6 below shows the value for each answer in the online survey.
After assigning values for each answer in the online survey, the means was calculated by adding the totals used in each question and dividing them by the number of participants. Table 7 below illustrates how the means were calculated using two examples, one from part one and one from part two of the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part One (Reasons)</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Part Two (opinions)</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 the values for the answers in the online survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>participants</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By conducting an analysis of the answers of the participants in the three categories above, interesting findings were made. These will be discussed and conclusions made in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general, the students’ answers to the questionnaire and interviews differed according to their own personal and cultural views. This results and discussion section attempts to answer the questions of the study and discuss factors that might relate to the participants’ answers to either the online questionnaire or the face-to-face interview. This section will follow the outline below:

A. Study Questions:

1. What reasons do non-native English students have for using their mother tongue in the English classroom?
   
   iii. In what contexts do non-native English students tend to use their mother tongue in the English classroom?
   
   iv. How often do non-native English students use their first language in the English classroom?

2. What do students think of the teachers’ use of the first language in the English classroom?
   
   ii. What do students think about the connections between classroom management and their use of their first language in the English classrooms?

3. How do students perceive the connection between the language they use outside classroom and their use of mother tongue in the English classroom?
ii. How do students see the connection between motivation to learn English and their use of English in the language classroom?

B. Additional findings:

i. Comparison between the participants’ answers depending on the first language differences.

ii. Comparison between the participants’ answers depending on age differences.

iii. Comparison between the participants’ answers depending on academic major differences.

iv. Comparison between the participants’ answers depending on language proficiency level differences.

By following the outline above, I aim to analyze and discuss the results of both the online questionnaires and the face-to-face interviews in detail. As stated earlier, the number of participants who started the online survey was 51 but only 46 participants completed the first part about their reasons for using the first language in English classroom while only 44 completed the second part about attitudes and perspectives about the first language use in English classrooms.

**Students’ use of the first language in the English classroom: reasons and frequency (Research Question 1):**

Table 8 below gives a summary of the participants’ reasons and frequency for using the first language in various classroom situations. It shows that in items 1 and 3,
which ask about explaining certain parts of the English lessons, four participants (8.7%) said that they *always* use their first language to explain new points in the lesson and three participants (6.5%) said that they *always* use the first language when they are the ones asking for explanations in English class. Most of the participants, eighteen in item 1 and nineteen in item 3 (39.1% and 41.3% respectively) said that they *sometimes* use the first language to ask about or explain new points in English classroom. However, seventeen (37.0%) participants said they *never* use the first language to explain or ask about points in the lesson during English class. The means in table 8 show a tendency among the participants to *sometimes* use the first language to explain and ask about new points during English lessons.

Answers to items 2 and 7 showed that three and five (6.5% and 10.9%) participants respectively said they *always* use their first language to chat with their classmates about general and personal topics that are not connected to the textbook. The highest number of participants, twenty-one (45.7%) in item two and twenty (43.5%) in item seven, said that they *sometimes* use the first language to talk about personal things during English classes (which can also be seen by examining the means for these two items with 2.1 and 2.2 successively). Twelve participants (26.1%) said that they *never* use the first language to chat with their classmates about personal topics and ones that are not related to textbook tasks.

Items 5 and 10 talk about the participants’ use of the first language when they are unable to find equivalent in the English language or because they do not know it. Two participants (4.3%) said they *always* use the first language when they cannot think of the word in English when they talk to their classmates who are also speakers of their first
language. Nevertheless, eleven participants (23.9%) said they never use the first language when they cannot think of the correct words in English when talking to classmates who share the same first language, while twenty-six (56.5%) said they sometimes do that. On the other hand, twenty-three participants (50%) said they never use the first language to say a word when talking to classmates who do not understand their first language.

Items 6 and 8 talked about using the first language during classroom tasks. In item 6 only one participant (2.2%) said that he/she always uses the first language when his/her classmates talk to him/her in the first language even during classroom activities. This is done especially when they need to finish classroom tasks faster. Most of the participants, seventeen (37.0%) in item 6 and twenty-four (52.2%) in item 8, said they never respond using the first language when their classmates start talking to them in the first language during classroom tasks.

In item 4 that only two participants (4.3%) said that they always use the first language to check the meaning of new words and concepts while nineteen participants (41.3%) said they sometimes do that. The same number of participants, nineteen (41.3%) said they never use the first language to check meaning of new words and concepts. However, as the means for this item (1.8) show, more participants stated that they sometimes used the first language in that situation than never. Previous studies (e.g. Alshammari, 2011; Kovacic and Kirinic, 2011; Saito and Ebsworth, 2004; Sharma, 2006), investigating the issue of first language use, agreed that one of the major reasons for using the first language in English classroom was to check the meaning of new words
and concepts. Interestingly enough, nearly half of the participants in the current study said they *never* use the first language to check the meanings of words and concepts.

In item 9, only two participants (4.3%) said they use their first language to remain connected to their first language while more than half of them, twenty-four participants (52.2%), said they *never* use the first language to remain connected their own cultures.

*Table 8* the participants’ answers to part 1 of the online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I am explaining a new point in the lesson to a classmate.</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I want to chat with my classmates about topics that may not be connected to class.</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I need to ask a classmate to explain a point in the lesson for me.</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I need to check the meaning of a new word or concept during the lesson.</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because I cannot think of the correct word in English when talking to my classmates</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I speak my first language in English class because my classmates start talking to me in my first language while we are working on a task</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interview participants had similar opinions to the survey participants. For example, participant 1, whose first language was Arabic, claimed that she sometimes spoke Arabic when she could not find the exact words in English. She believed she used Arabic also when interacting with students who do not have a high proficiency level of English language:

*If I couldn't find the words or the sentences to get through in the English language, so I just turn.... Switch into the Arabic. And probably if the student was not that much good level of English, I would use a mix of English and Arabic.*

Participant 2, whose first language is Chinese Mandarin, said that he used his first language a lot when taking English classes. He claimed that the main reason was that he

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I speak my first language during English class when I talk about personal things with my classmates.</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>In English class, I speak my first language with other members of my group who speak my first language because we want to finish class activities faster.</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I speak my first language with my classmates during English class because it makes me feel more connected to my culture</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Because I can't think of the words in English, I speak in my first language, even when others may not understand me.</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was not able to express himself in English and all other students were speaking the first language as well:

*The major reason was I couldn’t express myself very well in English, so we have to.*

*And sometimes it also ... I don’t know... when we were young and if felt so strange if you kept speaking a foreign language in a class where all the classmates were Chinese.*

The results suggest that students use their first language in a number of situations for different reasons and in various frequencies. Some of the findings, as mentioned, contradict previous studies, suggesting that contextual factors may play a major role in students’ choices. It may also be the case that survey approaches are not easily able to identify the connection between reasons and frequencies. As an example of this issue, we can see that most of the participants responded with *sometimes* to most of the questions in the online questionnaire. Most of the participants claimed they *sometimes* use first language to ask or explain new ideas or concepts during English class. Most of them also claimed that they *sometimes* use their first language to chat or talk about personal matters in English classrooms. The interview data elicited more detail, but participation rates were low. Still, the findings seem to suggest that there are no clear patterns to support or refute any previous work when the findings are examined as simple reasons and frequencies.
Students’ views of the teachers’ and classmates use and knowledge of the first language (Research Question 2):

In this question, I discuss the participants’ view of how the teachers’ knowledge and use of first language is connected to their own use of first language. Classroom management refers to the choices that teachers make in the general running of the class. For example, the language the teacher uses can suggest how he manages his class and whether he encourages the use of first language or not. Another element of classroom management is seating arrangements. Whether the students sit next to students who speak the same first language or not—and how a teacher positions or condones these seating arrangements—can also be considered classroom management and can impact the connection with the participant’s own use of the first language. Furthermore, the application of an English-Only policy in the classroom is another type of classroom management. In general, classroom management in this study refers to these types of classroom arrangements, facilities and the rules followed by the teachers and the students. Several of the survey questions directly concerns these types of classroom management related issues (e.g., part 2, Questions 2, 3), and others are based on the understanding that teachers have or do not have of these types of management techniques in the classrooms (e.g., part 1, Questions 2, 3).

Table 9 below shows the students’ attitudes about the use of the first language in English classrooms. Item 1 shows that fifteen participants (34.1%) felt neutral about having a teacher who was able to speak their first language. However, the total number of participants who agreed on having a teacher who knew their first language was fifteen (34.1%). Almost the same number of participants, fourteen participants (31.8%)
disagreed about having a teacher who speaks their first language, including six participants (13.6%) who strongly disagreed with the idea of having a teacher who knows the students’ first language. In other words, the students were about equal within the categories of agreeing, disagreeing, or neutral but the means (2.98) showed a tendency among the participants to be neutral about having a teacher who spoke their first language. The similar number of participants who either agreed, disagreed, or were neutral about having a teacher who knew their first language was an interesting finding, one that was in conflict with previous studies. In the study conducted by Sharma (2006), for example, students agreed that the teacher should use the first language in the English classroom. In other words, they preferred if their teachers knew their first language. The current study also differs from the study conducted by Nazary (2008), in which 72 percent of his participants agreed that they preferred a teacher who knew their first language. The students in Saito and Ebsworth (2004) preferred to be taught by a teacher who knew the Japanese language.

*Table 9* the participants’ answers to part 2 of the online survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In English class, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I would prefer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English class.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I think my English class should have an “English Only Policy.” (This means only English is allowed in the English classroom.)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. As my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English class.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I want to be able to speak my first language in English class when I feel I need to.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It’s not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Using dictionaries and resources in the first language should be allowed in English class.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Speaking my first language with my classmates between and during class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I think I speak in my first language more often than I speak English in English class.</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Having to speak English only in class makes me feel nervous.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in the interviews had similar attitudes towards the teachers’ use of the first languages in the English classroom. For example, participant 3, whose first language is Kurdish, said that he preferred a teacher who does not know his first language in order to maximize the amount of English language he could be exposed to.

He was our only chance to hear native English.
Participant 4, whose first language is Korean, had a similar attitude to the previous participant. She claimed that Korean students who are learning English preferred to have a teacher who did not know Korean. They preferred to have a native English teacher in order to have a better chance to practice English. However, personally, she claimed she did not care if the teacher knew her first language or not as long as he does not use it in English class.

*I think that most kind of Korean students prefer to be taught by native speakers of English because of they want to improve their listening skills and improve their pronunciation.*

In items 2 and 8 of the table, students stated their preferences regarding their classmates' first language knowledge and use. The table shows that fourteen participants (31.8%) felt neutral about sitting next to or talking to a classmate who could speak their first language in both survey items. However, in both items, most of the participants, eighteen (41%) in item 2 and sixteen (36.0%) in item 8, appeared not to prefer to sit next to or talk to a classmate who could speak their first language. The means (2.8) showed that in general, the participants were more neutral about sitting next to classmates who spoke their first language.

The table also summarizes the students' preferences of the classroom language. In item 3, participants stated their preferences about the use of an English-only policy in English classrooms. Twenty-seven participants (40.9%) agreed that they preferred the English only policy in their English classroom while eleven participants (25.0%) strongly agreed that they preferred using this policy. Only two participants (4.5%) strongly disagreed and four (9.1%) disagreed to following the English-only policy. This shows
that students preferred to speak English only when in an English class. That can be supported by the participants’ answers to item seven, which showed that sixteen participants (36.4%) stated that the use of L1 resources and dictionaries should be allowed in English classrooms. Students’ use of dictionaries and resources to find English equivalents for the words they do not know in English help them use English only in their English classrooms.

The results of answers to item three differ from the results of previous studies in which participants preferred to use of the first language in English classroom. For example, in Kovacic and Kirinic (2011), 56.1 percent of the participants agreed they sometimes prefer to use their first language during English classes. On the other hand, the study conducted by Nazary (2008) resulted in similar findings as the present study. In that study, most of the participants preferred to use English only in English classrooms while only 13 percent of the participants preferred if the first language was also used in English classroom in addition to English.

Personal language preferences of the participants were analyzed via items 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10 in table 2. In item 4 sixteen participants (36.4%) agreed that they felt more comfortable speaking English as their language proficiency improves. Only four participants (9.1%) strongly disagreed that they felt more comfortable using English as their language developed. That can be supported by participants’ answers to item 10 as twelve participants (27.3%) said that speaking English only in English classroom does not make them feel nervous.

Sixteen participants (36.4%) felt neutral about using their first language in English classroom. However, fifteen participants (34.1%) either agreed or strongly
agreed that they preferred to be given the choice to use their first language while eleven of them (29.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed about having the choice to use the L1 in the English classroom, once again showing a relatively equal spread of responses but the means (2.98) help to paint a clearer picture of the participants’ preferences, showing that most of the participants leaned more towards being neutral. Participants’ preference to be given the choice to use the L1 when needed was also supported by their answers to item number 6 as twelve participants (27.3%) said they thought it was important to use English even if it meant they might not be able to complete a task more quickly. In general, it can be concluded from these two items that students wish to be given the choice to use their first language when they think they need to but they do not want to use it to finish tasks faster.

The final point discussed whether participants used their first language more than English or the opposite. Twenty-five participants (56.8%) said that they do not use their first language more than English in English classrooms. Only eight participants (18.1%) said that they use their first language more than English in English classrooms.

The results of this study suggest that students prefer to use English in the English classroom, despite acknowledging reasons for using the L1. These findings, just as with the ones discussed for the first research question, did not fully support the findings in the previous literature. In the current study, students did not prefer to have a teacher who spoke their first language. They preferred to be exposed to English as much as they can in order to improve their English learning. This study shows that even if the students felt the need to use their first language sometimes, they still also feel the need to hear English most of the time. For that same reason, most of the participants did not prefer to
sit next to a classmate who spoke their first language. This is also supported by students’ agreement to the use of English-only policy in English classrooms. It suggests that students understand the importance of listening to English and being exposed to it. Participants also felt more comfortable using English as their English language proficiency improved. All these results suggest a general preference among the participants to use English in their English classroom even if they still use it in different situations. It also appears that the participants tried to reduce the amount of first language spoken by having a teacher who does not speak their language and by sitting next to a classmate who does not speak their first language. As with the first question, further research is needed, and an attempt to re-analyze the data to clarify the findings will be made later in this report.

**Students’ use of the first language inside and outside classroom (Research Question 3):**

I asked the participants in the face-to-face interview about the language they use outside the classroom. The amount of time students spend in the classroom is little compared to the amount of time they spend outside the classroom. As a result and taking into consideration how people form their daily life habits I tried to look at the language participants used outside the classroom. For example, it would be logical to assume that participants who are used to speaking English even outside the classroom in social gatherings and when with friends would probably use more English in the classroom and less of the first language. Consequently, I hoped that by probing participants with
this question, I would have an idea of how the outside settings of the participants would affect what they think of the first language use and the amount they use.

Participant 1, for example, said that her language choice depends on the person she is talking to. When talking to people from her own country either face-to-face or online, she would use Arabic. When interacting with Arabs from different countries, she would rather use English.

*It depends on the kind of Arabic, like if it is from my... Iraq, I would talk Arabic but from other countries we will do English to make it more clear.*

The Arabic participant raised an interesting topic that some speakers use English when dealing with speakers of different dialects even if they both speak the same language. As I am a native speaker myself, I understood what the interviewee was talking about. Sometimes it is because it is difficult to understand other dialects, and trying to speak standard Arabic sounds artificial to us. For that reason, it often is easier to speak in English when dealing with speakers from other countries specially if the speaker’s English language proficiency is high. Because I am unfamiliar with the three other languages of the interview participants, I did not ask them the same question. Further research might delve into this issue of English use with country-mates, to see the extent to which code-switching occurs and to see how this language use impacts on the use of English in the ESL classroom.

Participant 2 said that he used Chinese Mandarin a lot outside the classroom. He also said that the language he used depends on the people he is talking to. As he lived with a roommate who was also a Mandarin speaker, he had to use his first language all
the time outside the classroom. However, when he interacted with other international students who do not speak Mandarin, he would use English rather than Mandarin.

*I stayed with a Chinese roommate, so I spoke Chinese all the time. And if I go to someplace with other international students, I have to speak English and it depends.*

Participant 3 had a wider range of Turkish acquaintances with whom he used the first language to interact. He usually used Kurdish when talking to family and friends on the phone or online. He also attended Turkish community meetings here in the United States in which he used Turkish rather than English.

*Over the phone and on the Internet, we use Kurdish.... online and on the phone. In the Turkish community here, we speak Turkish outside the class where everybody is Turkish... In general, when we have a dinner or meeting, anything like a social gatherings, we usually use Turkish.*

Participant 4 said that she used Korean when she met her Korean friends and in religious services. She attended a Korean Church in which she spoke Korean only. She also said that she used Korean when interacting with other Koreans around the university town in which she lived. Another interesting point was that she mentioned she preferred to read the news about Korea in Korean and not in English. She said it was easier for her to connect the news written in Korean to the image she had about her culture. This shows that some speakers use their first language with topics or issues related to their home country and the first language speakers.

*Whenever I meet my Korean friends and also even at church, I go to Korean and so of course at there I use Korean... I frequently read the news on Korean website... I*
prefer to read some news and articles about Korean society. It is more easier for me to process all the information about what is going on in Korea.

The results suggest that most of the participants used their first language to a large extent outside the classroom. They used their first language in social gatherings and most of the interactions outside the classroom. All the participants expressed that they usually use first language to interact with other speakers of the same first language outside the English classrooms. As the English classroom itself might have some sort of social interaction among the students, they sometimes try to use their first language to talk to other students who speak their same language and who also share the same culture. Yet while acknowledging the opportunities to speak the L1 out of class, these individuals also generally preferred an English-only policy in class, as the results of the second research question suggested. These interview participants appeared to be motivated to speak their L1 outside of the classroom and the L2 inside. Previous studies have not explored this connection. Given the low number of participants in the current study and the lack of consistency in studies regarding the students’ preferences for L1 or L2 in the classroom, more research is needed. Future research may be able to see if there is a statistical correlation between students’ use of language outside of class and their motivation in class.
Students’ opinions and perspectives on different issues regarding the first language use:

From the online questionnaire and the face-to-face interview several issues arose that necessitated a further look. In the following sections, I will discuss the findings that add to the information presented in the previous sections, but in interesting ways.

English improvement and the first language use:

In the online questionnaire, sixteen participants (36.4%) agreed while fifteen (34.1%) strongly agreed that they feel more and more comfortable using English as their language improves. That suggests that as students improve their English, the reasons behind their use of the first language may change. For example, most of the previous studies and the current study as well indicated that students use the first language to explain and check the meaning of new words and concepts. They also use the L1 to learn grammar and for the teachers to give instructions. But as the students’ English proficiency improves, the need for the first language equivalents decreases and their ability in English increases. As a result, they become more able to express themselves in English, and the use of the first language declines. They feel more and more comfortable using English, and yet they still use their first language. All the participants in the online interview stated that they feel very comfortable using their first language as they can express themselves better and more accurately.
The first language background:

Table 1 below shows the number of participants from different first language backgrounds. It also shows the number of participants who completed parts one and two of the online survey. The final results included only the participants who completed the survey in full.

Table 1 Different first language backgrounds of the online survey participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th># of participants who started the survey</th>
<th># of participants complete part 1</th>
<th># of participants who complete part 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this discussion, only the two languages—Chinese and Arabic—will be analyzed. The choice of these two languages was based on the highest number of participants. As we see in table 1, all other language participants did not exceed three participants, and having such a small number renders it difficult to draw generalizations.
Also, as Chinese and Arabic have different linguistic features and different cultures, this would also help in the comparison of the answers of the two groups of participants.

Figures 1 and 2 showed the Chinese and Arabic participants’ answers on the online survey questions in part 1. As we see in the charts, these two groups had some slight differences in their responses to the survey. For example, most of the Chinese participants were more towards saying that they sometimes (M= 2.3 and 2.4) use the first language to explain new points while most of the Arab participants were more towards saying they never do that (M= 2.1 and 1.7). The means here suggest that there was a slight but not remarkable difference in the answers of two groups of participants. Also, most of the Arab participants said they never respond to their classmates in their first language when they start talking to them in Arabic (M= 1.6). On the other hand, most of the Chinese participants said they sometimes respond using Chinese when their classmates start speaking to them in Chinese (M= 2.2). In addition, most of the Chinese speakers said they sometimes use their first language to feel connected to their culture (M= 2.1) while most of the Arab participants said they never use Arabic to feel connected to their culture (M= 1.1). Moreover, Chinese participants claimed they sometimes use their first language to finish class activities faster (M=2.0) while Arab participants claimed they never do (M= 1.2). From the table of means, we could also see some similarities between the two groups of participants. For example, both groups said they sometimes use their first languages when speaking about personal things during English class (M= 2.3 for both groups). These findings suggest that the first language might be related to the reasons English learners speak their first languages. Because of the low number of participants, I can only say that this appears to be a trend, based on frequency.
results. Further research and statistical analysis would be needed to verify whether these trends are significant.

*Figure 2* Chinese participants’ answers to part 1

![Chinese participants' answers to part 1](image)

*Figure 3* Arab participants’ answers to part 1

![Arab participants' answers to part 1](image)

The first language background appears to relate to the participants’ opinions and perspectives. For example, there was a slight difference between the two groups in responding to item 4. Chinese participants *agreed* that they feel more comfortable speaking English as their English language proficiency improves ($M = 3.7$) while the Arab
participants strongly agreed with that (M= 4.8). There was also a difference in the two groups’ answers to item 8. The Arab participants claimed that they disagreed with the idea of speaking their first during class if the class was not a speaking class (2.4). On the other hand, Chinese participants said they were neutral about that idea (M= 3.4). Most of the Arab participants responded with disagree (M= 1.4) while most of the Chinese participants responded with neutral (M= 2.9) when they were asked if they spoke their first language more than English in English classrooms.

*Figure 4* Chinese participants’ answers to part 2
Tables 10 and 11 below show the means for the Chinese and Arabic participants to survey questions parts 1 and 2.

**Table 10** means of the participants’ answers to part one of the survey (L1 background)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I speak my first language in English class because I am explaining a new point in the lesson to a classmate.</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I speak my first language in English class because I want to chat with my classmates about topics that may not be connected to class.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I speak my first language in English class because I need to ask a classmate to explain a point in the lesson for me.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I speak my first language in English class because I need to check the meaning of a new word or concept during the lesson.</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I speak my first language in English class because I cannot think of the correct word in English when talking to my classmates</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 I speak my first language in English class because my classmates start talking to me in my first language while we are working on a task</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I speak my first language during English class when I talk about personal things with my classmates.</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 10 Continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>In English class, I speak my first language with other members of my group who speak my first language because we want to finish class activities faster.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I speak my first language with my classmates during English class because it makes me feel more connected to my culture</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Because I can’t think of the words in English, I speak in my first language, even when others may not understand me.</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11** the means of the participants’ answers to part 2 of the survey (L1 background)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In English class, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I would prefer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English class.</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I think my English class should have an “English Only Policy.” (This means only English is allowed in the English classroom.)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>As my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English class.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I want to be able to speak my first language in English class when I feel I need to.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>It’s not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Using dictionaries and resources in the first language should be allowed in English class.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Speaking my first language with my classmates between and during class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I think I speak in my first language more often than I speak English in English class.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Having to speak English only in class makes me feel nervous.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above examples from both parts 1 and 2 show that there appears to be differences in several reasons and opinions about first language use in English classroom based on first language differences. As previously mentioned, however, further research is required. Nevertheless, there seemed to be not only differences but similarities and agreement in opinion as well. For example, most of the participants in both groups responded with agree and neutral (M = 3.7 for Chinese and M = 3.3 for Arab) to item 7 in which they were asked if they agreed to allowing resources and dictionaries in English classrooms. They also had similar responses to item 2 as most of the participants in both groups responded with neutral when they were asked if they would prefer to sit next to a classmate who spoke their first language (M = 3.1 for Chinese and M = 2.8 for Arab).

**Age Differences:**

It was difficult to divide the participants into age groups that contained the same number of participants. Most of the participants were between ages 18 and 21. It was clear that the highest number of participants were in that age group because most of the online questionnaire participants were students in the English language program at the university. As a result, the first age group contained almost half of the online questionnaire participants while the other two groups had almost similar number of participants (12 and 14 respectively). Taking that into consideration, the participants in the online survey were divided into three age groups. The first age group was between 18 and 21; the second age group was between 22 and 27, and the third age group between 28 and 40. There was one participant aged 49 who was excluded because
he/she did not complete either parts 1 or 2. Table 7 below shows the different age

Table 7 the number of participants in the three age groups in the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th># of participants who started the survey</th>
<th># of participants who completed part 1</th>
<th># of participants who completed part 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Group 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18- 21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group 2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22- 27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Group 3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(28- 40)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to carry out a discussion and comparison between the answers of the

three age groups, we will look at what most of the participants answered to both parts of

the online survey. Table 8 below shows the three groups’ preferred answers to the first

part of the online survey, which asked about the different reasons for using the first

language in English classrooms.

Table 8 Age groups preferred answers to part 1 of the online survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Age Group 1 (18- 21)</th>
<th>Age Group 2 (22- 27)</th>
<th>Age Group 3 (28- 40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I speak my first language in English class because I am explaining a new point in the lesson to a classmate.</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.1)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I speak my first language in English class because I want to chat with my classmates about topics that may not be connected to class.</td>
<td>Usually (3.1)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.0)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we see in table 12, there are many differences and similarities in the age groups’ reasons for using the first language in English classrooms. For example, in items 5 and 7 the three age groups agreed they sometimes they speak their first language because they cannot think of the correct word in English or when they talk about personal matters. It was noticed that most of the participants in the online survey and in
the face-to-face interview preferred to use their first language when talking about personal matters with their classmates. It appears as though they felt it was more appropriate to address private topics using the first language, as it was not part of the English class that was taking place during their conversations.

There were times where one of the age groups had different reasons from the other two, but there were no situations in which the three age groups had totally different answers from one another. For example, in responses to items 1 and 6, we find that participants in age group 2 differ in their answers from age groups 1 and 3. Both age groups 1 and 3 responded that they sometimes used their first language when explaining or asking about a new point in the class while age group 2 said they never used their first language.

In item 2, age group 1 differed in their answers from age groups 2 and 3. The participants were asked if they used their first language when chatting with their classmates about personal topics. Age groups 2 and 3 said they sometimes do that while age group 1 said they usually use their first language. This could suggest that young learners and undergraduate tend to use their first language more often when talking about private matters more than older and graduate students did. It would be interesting to investigate the issue further by looking more deeply and systematically at the use of the first language based on age factor.

Age group 3 also differed from age groups 1 and 2 in item 4 where participants were asked how often they use their first language to a classmate when they need to check the meaning of a new word during the lesson. Age groups 1 and 2 responded with sometimes while age group 3 responded with never. From a general look at the responses
of the participants in the three age groups in the table above, we can see that the younger learners tended to use the first language more often while the older participants tried to use it less often. The middle age group tended to balance between the two. This would not be surprising if there were connections between age and proficiency level.

Table 13 below shows the participants answers to part 2 of the online survey. Again, there seem to be similarities and differences in the responses of the different age groups. For example, in item 1 all the participants in the three age groups responded with neutral when asked whether they agreed or not with the idea of having a teacher who could speak their first language in English class. They all also agreed with the idea of an “English only policy” in item 3. This shows that they all preferred to speak English only in the English classroom in spite of the fact that they also wanted to use their first language. Liang (1998) presented the idea of students being in the horns of a dilemma with regards to wanting to use both English and their first language in the same context in the English classroom. In the current study, this “double wish” may be because students at the university level understand the importance of using English, but as it is difficult for them to speak English, they use their first languages instead. As a result, they would prefer if the teachers forced them to use English only in class.

We also see differences in the responses of the three age groups. For example, in item 6, age groups 2 and 3 disagreed with using the first language during class activities while the first age group felt neutral about that idea. This may also be connected to their answers in part 1 when age group 1 showed a higher tendency to use the first language in English classroom more than the other two age groups did. In item 5, we see that age
group 2 differed from age groups 1 and 3. Age group 2 agreed with the idea of having the choice to use their first language whenever they feel they need to while the other age groups felt neutral about it. This might be connected to the idea that younger learners prefer to use the first language while older group preferred not to. On the other hand, it would appear that the middle age group held a middle opinion between the two; they preferred to be given the choice depending on their own situations and needs.

There was also a difference between the response of age group 3 and that of age groups 1 and 2 in item 2. Age groups 1 and 2 felt neutral about sitting next to a classmate who could speak their first language while age group 3 disagreed with the idea of sitting next to a classmate who could speak their first language. This also supports the idea that older participants tried to lessen the amount of first language use in English classroom. By sitting next to a classmate who could speak the same first language, there may be a higher chance of speaking the first language. It seems likely that for this reason, age group 3 disagreed with that idea.

The idea of different opinions depending on the different age groups was even clearer with responses to item 10. The younger age group agreed with the idea that having to speak English only in class made them feel nervous, while the middle age group felt neutral about that idea. On the other hand, the older age group disagreed with that idea completely. The results again support the idea that the younger learners in this study tended to feel more comfortable using their first language and used it more often while those in the older age group feel more comfortable using English and tended to use it more often. It also shows that the middle age group held a middle “neutral” position between the two, more extreme age group differences.
Table 13 the answers of the three age groups to part 2 of the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Age Group 1 (18-21)</th>
<th>Age Group 2 (22-27)</th>
<th>Age Group 3 (28-40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In English class, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral (3.1)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.9)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I would prefer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English class.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral (2.8)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.9)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I think my English class should have an “English Only Policy.” (This means only English is allowed in the English classroom.)</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree (3.8)</td>
<td>Agree (3.8)</td>
<td>Agree (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>As my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English class.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree (3.7)</td>
<td>Strongly agree (4.6)</td>
<td>Strongly agree (4.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I want to be able to speak my first language in English class when I feel I need to.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral (2.9)</td>
<td>Agree (3.5)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>It’s not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral (2.9)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.3)</td>
<td>Disagree (1.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Using dictionaries and resources in the first language should be allowed in English class.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral (3.4)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.4)</td>
<td>Agree (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Speaking my first language with my classmates between and during class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral (3.2)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.4)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I think I speak in my first language more often than I speak English in English class.</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Neutral (2.8)</td>
<td>Strongly disagree (1.4)</td>
<td>Strongly disagree (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Having to speak English only in class makes me feel nervous.</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree (3.6)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.8)</td>
<td>Disagree (1.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language Proficiency Level:

Table 10 below shows the self-reported proficiency levels of the participants who completed parts 1 and 2 of the online survey. Participants were asked to write down what they thought their English language proficiency level was. There were no tests to measure their English proficiency level. As we see in table 10, most of the participants described themselves as between low intermediate to advanced level of English. In the following discussion, we will look at how the reasons and opinions regarding the first language use in English classrooms appear to differ according to the different levels of English language proficiency.

Table 2 Different English proficiency levels of the online survey participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of participants who started the survey</th>
<th># of participants who completed part 1</th>
<th># of participants who completed part 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low beginner</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High beginner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low intermediate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High intermediate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 below shows the five language proficiency levels answers to part 1 of the online survey. As there are more groups, five instead of the three presented in the discussion about age groups, the differences were greater. Most of the items generated three different responses with the different language level groups. For example, in item
1, the low beginners said they *usually* use the first language when explaining a new point in the lesson, the higher beginners and low intermediate said they use it *sometimes*, while the high intermediate and advanced level participants said they *never* use the first language to explain new points. It seems as though participants who have low levels of English tend to use their first language more often than do higher-level participants.

We see similar results with item 8, in which participants were asked how often they used the first language to finish class activities faster. The low beginners said they *usually* do that, while high beginners and low intermediate said they *sometimes* do that. On the other hand, high intermediate and advanced students said they *never* use the first language during English classes to finish class activities faster.

We can also see that low beginners differed from the other language level groups in their answers to most of the items in part 1 of the survey. For example, in item 5, in which they were asked how often they use their first languages when they cannot think of the right word in English, low beginners responded *usually* while all the other language level groups responded with *sometimes*. This suggests that low-level students tend to use the first language more than higher levels do. This can be explained by the fact that low-level students may not have large vocabularies in comparison to high-level students. For that reason, they replace it with their first language in order to communicate with their classmates. They admit to doing that more often than their higher-level classmates do.
Table 14 language proficiency levels answers to part 1 of the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Low beginner</th>
<th>High beginner</th>
<th>Low intermediate</th>
<th>High intermediate</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I speak my first language in English class because I am explaining a new point in the lesson to a classmate.</td>
<td>Usually (3.0)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.0)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
<td>Never (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I speak my first language in English class because I want to chat with my classmates about topics that may not be connected to class.</td>
<td>Usually (3.3)</td>
<td>Usually (2.6)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.0)</td>
<td>Sometimes (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I speak my first language in English class because I need to ask a classmate to explain a point in the lesson for me.</td>
<td>Usually (2.7)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.3)</td>
<td>Sometimes (1.6)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I speak my first language in English class because I need to check the meaning of a new word or concept during the lesson.</td>
<td>Usually (2.6)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.3)</td>
<td>Sometimes (1.8)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I speak my first language in English class because I cannot think of the correct word in English when talking to my classmates</td>
<td>Usually (2.7)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.0)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.3)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.1)</td>
<td>Sometimes (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 I speak my first language in English class because my classmates start talking to me in my first language while we are working on a task</td>
<td>Usually (2.5)</td>
<td>Usually (2.6)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.0)</td>
<td>Never (1.3)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I speak my first language during English class when I talk about personal things with my classmates.</td>
<td>Usually (3.0)</td>
<td>Usually (2.6)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Sometimes (1.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Below is the table for the participants’ answers to part 2 of the online survey. We also see some differences in the opinions of the different language level groups. For example, low and high beginner participants in item 2 agreed with the idea of sitting next to a classmate who spoke their first language while low and high intermediate participants felt neutral about that idea. Advanced level participants strongly disagreed with the idea of sitting next to a classmate who spoke their first language. This also supports the previous idea that higher-level students feel more comfortable using English than low level ones.

Answers to item 6 also support the idea that students’ answers can differ according to different language levels. Low and high beginners with low intermediate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Low beginner</th>
<th>High beginner</th>
<th>Low intermediate</th>
<th>High intermediate</th>
<th>advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In English class, I speak my first language with other members of my group who speak my first language because we want to finish class activities faster.</td>
<td>Usually (2.7)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.4)</td>
<td>Sometimes (1.8)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
<td>Never (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak my first language with my classmates during English class because it makes me feel more connected to my culture</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.4)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
<td>Never (1.3)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I can’t think of the words in English, I speak in my first language, even when others may not understand me.</td>
<td>Usually (3.0)</td>
<td>Sometimes (2.2)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
<td>Never (1.4)</td>
<td>Never (1.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
participants felt *neutral* about the idea that it is not important to speak English as long as they finish class activities. However, high intermediate and advanced level participants responded with *disagree* and *strongly disagree* respectively. This suggests that higher-level students believe they need to speak English in the classroom while low-level students use the first language because it is easier for them.

This is again supported by the answers to item 9 in part 1 of the online survey. Low beginners *agreed* that they speak their first language more than they speak English when in English classroom. On the other hand, high beginners and low intermediate responded with *neutral* to that item while high intermediate and advanced students *strongly disagreed* to that point which indicates that they speak English more than their first languages.

In addition to these differences between the five language level groups, we find some similarities in their answers. For example, all participants from the first levels responded with *neutral* to item 5 in which they were asked if they want to be given the choice to use their first language whenever they feel they need to. This might be explained by connecting it to item 3, in which most of the participants *agreed* with the idea of English only policy. Most students hope to speak English only in the classroom but lack the ability to express ideas and thoughts solely in English, making it difficult for low-level students. As a result, students with low English levels lean on the first language more than higher-level English students do.
Table 15 language proficiency levels answers to part 2 of the online survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Low Beginner</th>
<th>High Beginner</th>
<th>Low Intermediate</th>
<th>High Intermediate</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 In English class, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language.</td>
<td>Agree (3.7)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.4)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.3)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.9)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I would prefer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English class.</td>
<td>Agree (3.7)</td>
<td>Agree (3.6)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.8)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.0)</td>
<td>Strongly disagree (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I think my English class should have an “English Only Policy.” (This means only English is allowed in the English classroom.)</td>
<td>Agree (4.3)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.4)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.4)</td>
<td>Strongly agree (4.5)</td>
<td>Agree (3.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 As my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English class.</td>
<td>Agree (4.0)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.4)</td>
<td>Agree (3.8)</td>
<td>Strongly agree (4.5)</td>
<td>Agree (4.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I want to be able to speak my first language in English class when I feel I need to.</td>
<td>Neutral (3.3)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.6)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.1)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.3)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 It’s not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.</td>
<td>Neutral (3.0)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.2)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.1)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.4)</td>
<td>Strongly disagree (1.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Using dictionaries and resources in the first language should be allowed in English class.</td>
<td>Agree (4.3)</td>
<td>Agree (3.6)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.4)</td>
<td>Agree (3.5)</td>
<td>Agree (3.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Speaking my first language with my classmates between and during class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.</td>
<td>Agree (4.3)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.2)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.1)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.4)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 I think I speak in my first language more often than I speak English in English class.</td>
<td>Agree (3.7)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.4)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.5)</td>
<td>Strongly disagree (1.3)</td>
<td>Strongly disagree (1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Having to speak English only in class makes me feel nervous.</td>
<td>Agree (4.3)</td>
<td>Disagree (2.4)</td>
<td>Neutral (3.1)</td>
<td>Neutral (2.9)</td>
<td>Strongly disagree (1.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we have seen from the tables, charts, and discussions above, there seemed to be differences between the participants in the different categories. Chinese participants seemed to be using the first language more than the Arab participants did. Also, younger learners tended to use their first language more than middle and old learners did. Older learners tried to depend on English more often than the other two age groups did. Moreover, low-level language students used the first language more often than did the higher level ones. However, as the previous discussion suggested, there were many differences as well as similarities between the different groups.

The findings of this study add new results to the field of English education. To the best of my understanding, there have been no studies looking at the relationship between age and language level on one hand and the use of first language in English classrooms on the other. This study provides some insight into how the first language background, age, and English language level relate to the frequency of first language use, and further research should examine the connection between these factors and other factors such as academic field and the amount and reasons behind using first language. For example, it may be that the older the participants, the less of the first language they use in English classes. Also, as participants have a more advanced level of English proficiency, they tend to use first language less than beginners or participants with low level of English language proficiency. Finally, it may be that some participants from certain first language background tend to use their first language in English classrooms more than speakers of other languages. I have not analyzed the connection between the first language use in the English classroom and the academic fields of the participants.
but there may be a relationship there as well. In fields where English terms and words are used such as Medicine and Engineering, students may use the first language less than students in other academic fields.

Conducting further research about these topics will help teachers and students understand some of the reasons and opinions of the students about the first language use in the English classrooms. This knowledge and understanding will facilitate efforts to improve English language proficiency and help expose the students to a greater amount of English language instead of the first language. It will also help the students reach a higher level of English proficiency and get them closer to being fluent in English language as they decrease the amount of the first language used in the classroom and increase the amount of English language used. Further research needs to be carried out systematically to explore the interrelationships among the various factors related to first language use in the English classroom and their effect on students’ reasons for and attitudes about first language use in ESL classrooms.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The discussion in the current paper has aimed to respond to the research questions posed in the first chapter. The first question asked about the different reasons students have for using their first language in English classrooms. The first question also asked about the frequency of the first language use in English classrooms. This study found that students have various reasons for using the first language in the classroom. Participants in the online survey and in the face-to-face interviews agreed that they sometimes used the first language to explain and ask about the new ideas and concepts presented in English classes, to feel connected to their cultures, and when they felt they could not find the correct word in English. For the answers to most of the reasons in part one of the online survey, the participants chose to answer with sometimes, suggesting that they did not have extreme reactions to most of the contexts presented. Participants in previous studies (e.g., Kovacic&Kirinic, 2011; Sharma, 2006) also said they sometimes use their first language, and that they would prefer having their first languages used a little in the English classrooms. The current study was not able to ascertain the various reasons with the assurance that previous studies had suggested, perhaps because of the low numbers in this study or because of the current research design. Moreover, as the survey did not ask the students to state their own reasons for using L1 and instead had them comment on stated ideas, it may be that there are even more pressing reasons that students like to use their L1s in English class. Further research could probe these reasons.
The second question in the current study asked about the students' various attitudes towards the use of their first languages in English classrooms. Most of the students neither agreed nor disagreed with having a teacher or classmates who spoke their first language. Most agreed with following the English-Only policy in their classrooms. As the English proficiency of the speakers improved, they appeared to feel more comfortable using English in English classrooms. The participants also said that they use English more than they used their first language in English classrooms, and that speaking English does not make them feel nervous. This seemed to contradict some of the findings of earlier studies in which students preferred to use the first language for various tasks. This may be due to the difference between the EFL environment of the earlier studies and the ESL context of the current work. Findings from this study suggest that future research should examine correlations between proficiency levels and age levels with these reasons and frequencies to offer more information on the context of the classrooms and the use of the L1.

The third question in the study asked about the participants' use of the first language outside the English classrooms and used the responses generated via the face-to-face interviews. All of the participants claimed they use their first languages when interacting with people who spoke their first language. They used their first language in social gatherings and when talking to their families online. In addition, one of the participants claimed that she preferred to use her first language when discussing issues related to her home country because it felt more appropriate and realistic. These findings are not surprising in the light of previous work (e.g., Norton, 1995), which found
that students invested their language use and learning differently in different situations, depending on their stake and position in those situations.

There were additional results in the study that were interesting and have not, to the best of my knowledge, been investigated in previous studies. This research suggests that when the findings were analyzed in terms of first language background, age, and English language proficiency level, different patterns emerged. The results suggested that Arabic speakers used the first language less than the Chinese speakers. It also appeared that the Chinese speakers were more willing to learn from teachers who spoke their first language and sit with students who also spoke their first language. The responses also changed depending on age differences of the participants. Younger learners seemed to be more willing to use first language in the English classrooms. They also seemed less confident about using English only. The middle age group held a position in the middle between the two extreme age groups. The older learners, on the other hand, exhibited a higher degree of confidence in using first language. They were more willing to use English in different contexts inside and outside the English classrooms.

English language proficiency level also appeared to have a connection to the types of responses generated in the online survey. The higher the level of the participants, the more they were willing to use English only in the classroom. With lower level English students, it was clear they relied more on the first language to express themselves and they felt more nervous when asked to use English in the English classrooms.

These three factors of age, first language background, and language proficiency need to be explored further to ascertain their full connection to the use of the first
language in English classes. The current study revealed some connections, but as discussed below, there were limitations that may have affected the interpretation of the findings.

**Limitations:**

There were number of limitations to the current study that would need to be addressed in future research. First, there were fewer participants in the face-to-face interviews than expected: the data set was limited to only four participants. Although their comments were interesting, they could not attempt to uncover the many ideas that this research hoped to bring to light. Moreover, all the participants in the face-to-face were graduate students in an English Department. To do this research justice, an analysis of the attitudes and responses of younger participants and participants from other departments and English proficiency level was needed. Second, there were only fifty participants in the online survey. Having a larger number of participants would have made it safer to make generalizations and might have changed the results of the current study. Third, it was difficult to divide the participants into equal numbers in each group, such as age and first language background groups, due to the low number of participants. Being able to form large groups of like individuals would have allowed for a much more comparative, quantitative study. Having a larger number of participants in the online survey and in the face-to-face interviews would have helped make more reliable generalizations regarding first language use in the English classrooms. Finally,
given that there were factors identified which interrelated in some way, future studies would need to run statistical analyses to test whether these interrelationships signified true patterns, or whether the findings of the current study were simply random.

**Recommendations for further research:**

As stated earlier, the results of the current study offer the first step into a wide variety of research in the area of first language use in English classroom. Further research investigating the students’ attitudes towards first language use in English classrooms in regard to first language background, age, and English language proficiency would be valuable. The current study suggested that there is a connection between these factors and the reasons and amount of first language used. However, statistical analysis was not conducted to find the various types of correlations between these factors and first language use. It would be interesting to conduct research investigating these areas. It would also be interesting to investigate the reasons and amount of first language use among students in different majors and departments.

This research has helped highlight the reasons students have for using first language in the English classroom. It also added to our understanding of their opinions about first language use in the English classes. In addition, it has provided an initial exploration into potential connections between first language, age, and English proficiency level on the one hand and students’ attitudes about and reasons for first language use on the other. This research, in other words, has helped pave the road for a long journey.
Implications:

The results of the current study, despite the problems of generalizability, have a number of implications in various fields. Teachers may be able to use the results to help reduce the amount of the first language used in English classrooms. The results may also help teachers understand the attitudes the students have towards first language use and allow them to discuss these reasons with their students. Students may also come to a better understanding of why they tend to use their first language in English classes. This knowledge could help them make better decisions regarding whether or not to use their first language. In addition, educators are offered a clearer picture of the reasons and attitudes of the students regarding the first language use in English classrooms in ESL settings. Realizing these reasons and attitudes may help teachers modify their teaching methods and techniques to help their students improve their English learning process and reduce the amount of first language use.
APPENDICES

Thesis Questionnaire

Native language --------------------- Home country -------------------------------
Age ----------------------------- Major -------------------------------------

How would you rate your level of English proficiency?
Low beginner  high beginner  low intermediate  high intermediate  advanced

Part One:

Please read the following statements that show a number of reasons why ESL students speak their first language (such as Chinese, Spanish or Arabic) in their ESL classes. How often do these reasons apply to you when YOU ARE in your English classroom? Please check the boxes next to each reason:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The reasons</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- I speak my first language in English class because I am explaining a new point in the lesson to a classmate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- I speak my first language in English class because I want to chat with my classmates about topics that may not be connected to class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- I speak my first language in English class because I need to ask a classmate to explain a point in the lesson for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- I speak my first language in English class because I need to check the meaning of a new word or concept during the lesson.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5- I speak my first language in English class because I cannot think of the correct word in English when talking to my classmates.

6- I speak my first language in English class because my classmates start talking to me in my first language while we are working on a task.

7- I speak my first language during English class when I talk about personal things with my classmates.

8- In English class, I speak my first language with other members of my group who speak my first language because we want to finish class activities faster.

9- I speak my first language with my classmates during English class because it makes me feel more connected to my culture.

10- Because I can’t think of the words in English, I speak in my first language, even when others may not understand me.

Others:
_________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

Part Two:

Please read the statements below that show different opinions and preferences ESL students have about using their first languages (such as Chinese, Spanish or Arabic) in English classrooms. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with these opinions. Please check the boxes next to each statement:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- In English class, it is best to have a teacher who can understand my first language.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- I would prefer to sit next to a classmate who speaks my first language in English class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- I think my English class should have an “English Only Policy.” (This means only English is allowed in the English classroom.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- As my English improves, I am becoming more comfortable speaking only English in English class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5- I want to be able to speak my first language in English class when I feel I need to.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- It’s not important to speak only English in class as long as I am completing the course tasks.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7- Using dictionaries and resources in the first language should be allowed in English class.</td>
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<td>8- Speaking my first language with my classmates between and during class activities should be okay as long as the course is not a speaking class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9- I think I speak in my first language more often than I speak English in English class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10- Having to speak English only in class makes me feel nervous.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others: ___________________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Interview Questions:

Using L1 in ESL: Interview questions

Native Language: -----------------------------

How long have you studied English: --------

1. Do you use your first language in class? How often? Why?
2. In what types of situations do you use your first language in class?
3. How comfortable are you using your first language in class?
4. Do you prefer speaking English or your first language in English class? Why?
5. For what tasks do you need to speak your first language in class? English?
6. Does your teacher ever use your first language in class? If so, is it useful?
   Distracting? What do you think about a teacher using your first language to teach English?
7. Where do you use your first language outside of English class? Where do you use English outside of English class? Do you prefer speaking your first language or English outside of English class? Why?
8. Is there anything else you’d like to share with me about your experience using your native language versus English in English classes?
Letter to English Program Director:

Dear Dr. XXXXXX,

My name is Wafa Al-Sharaeai and I am a student in the TESL/AL program in the English Department. I am conducting a study as a part of my thesis project on ESL students’ use of their L1 in learning English. This study aims at exploring the different perspectives non-native English students have about their use of their first language (e.g. Chinese or Arabic) in the English classrooms. The study aims at helping teachers understand the attitudes that English learners have towards the use of first language.

I am hoping that you will send the following message out to the students in your program so that they will have the opportunity to participate. If they agree to participate in this study, they will click on the link (shown below) to complete a 5- to 10-minute survey about their own views and attitudes towards the use of first languages in English classrooms. Completing the survey indicates consent to participate. There is also a second part to the study—a follow-up interview—and the survey will invite students to participate in this second part. A separate consent form will describe this part of the study for those who are interested.

If you would like more information about this study, please feel free to email me at (wafaa@iastate.edu) or my thesis supervisor, Tammy Slater, at tslater@iastate.edu. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Wafa Al-Sharaeai
The Message to be forwarded to the Students:

**Requesting Survey Participants from ESL classes!**

My name is Wafa Al-Sharaeai and I am a student in the TESL/AL program in the English Department. I am conducting a study as a part of my thesis project on ESL students’ use of their first language in English classroom. This study will help students understand their reasons for speaking their first languages in their English classrooms. The results of this study will also help the program administration understand the reasons why ESL students speak their first languages during ESL classes.

Please consider participating in this survey by clicking on the link below.

The survey should take between ten to fifteen minutes of your time. It will ask you about YOUR reasons for and opinions towards speaking your first language in the English language classroom. The survey is anonymous—I will not be able to connect it to your name.

The survey also invites you to participate in a follow-up interview that should last no more than twenty minutes and offer you a great chance to talk in English about your thoughts on using English only in the classroom. If you choose to do this interview, please fill out the information on that page. Filling out your contact information on this page will not connect you to your survey answers, but will let me know how to contact you for an interview.
If you have any further questions about participating in either the online survey or the face-to-face interviews, please contact me at (wafaa@iastate.edu) or call (515-227-1989). You can also email my supervisor, Dr. Tammy Slater, at (tslater@mail.iastate.edu).

Thank you for your time, and I wish you all the best for a great semester!
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Students’ Perspectives on the Use of L1 in ESL Classrooms

Investigators:

Wafa Al-Sharaeai

Dr. Tammy Slater

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore non-native English students’ perspectives and attitudes on their usage of their first language or mother tongue in English classrooms. You are being invited to participate in this second part of this study because you are a non-native English student in Iowa State University either in the IEOP program or the ENGL 99 and 101 classes in ISU and you participated in the earlier online survey.
DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, you will be asked several questions related to the online survey you took about your attitudes towards the use of first language or mother tongue (e.g. Chinese or Arabic) in English classrooms. These questions aim at getting your ideas expressed in your own words about the use of first language in English classrooms. The interviews will be tape-recorded and given a code number so that you cannot be identified after the interview. Your participation is a one-time event and will last no more than thirty minutes.

RISKS

There should be no risks to you while participating in this study. These interviews will be used to get your ideas and not to judge you. Every effort will be made to assure that your participation does not cause any discomfort to you. No-one will be able to identify you in any reports.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there might be a direct future benefit to you. Your teachers may have a better understanding of why you sometimes use your first language in English classrooms. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit the field of education by helping teachers develop teaching methods and techniques built on understanding the reasons and justifications for their students’ use of their first language in ESL classes.
COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, NIH, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

- The participation in the online survey is completely anonymous and participants cannot be identified by any of the investigators.
- The interviews, though they will be tape-recorded, will be number coded to assure anonymity of the participants to all extents possible.
- Only the two primary investigators will have access to the data collected.
- The data will be kept in password protected computer files.
- The collected data will be erased as the final thesis paper is written and published.

If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Wafa Al-Sharaeai (515-227-1989) or send an email to (wafaa@iastate.edu). You can also contact Dr. Tammy Slater at (tslater@mail.iastate.edu).

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive
the first two pages of this written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed) ________________________________

_____________________________  ________________

(Participant’s Signature)  (Date)
LIST OF REFERENCES


