

Bridging Languages: Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Translation Use in Saudi EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of teachers and learners regarding the use of translation as a pedagogical tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporated quantitative data from two questionnaires—the Inventory for Beliefs about Translation (IBT) and the Inventory for Translation as a Learning Strategy (ITLS) along with qualitative insights from focus group interviews with university students and educators. The sample included 60 university students and three educators from a private university. The findings indicated a slight difference in attitudes toward translation between first-year and second-year learners, as determined by an independent samples t-test. Additionally, learners believe that the use of translation strategies significantly helps their English language proficiency, serving as a dynamic strategy for comprehension, retention, and production. Teachers recognized the usefulness of translation strategies for teaching vocabulary and grammar, as well as clarifying meaning. However, they expressed caution regarding their frequency of use due to potential interference from their mother tongue and the time-consuming nature of translation activities. Despite mixed opinions, participants generally held positive beliefs about translation tasks to enhance learning across all language skills. The study highlights the importance of balancing contextualized strategies that promote English while utilizing students' native language and translation strategies, stressing the need for professional development to support teachers in embracing these plausible pedagogical tools.

Keywords: teachers and learners' perceptions, translation as a learning Strategy, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

1. Introduction

Translation in language teaching has historically been a subject of debate and scrutiny. Originating in the 16th century, translation served as an essential mechanism for instruction between Greek and Latin speakers (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, 1985). This practice gained significant traction during the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) era, which prevailed from the 1840s to the 1940s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, as the 19th century progressed, the educational landscape began to evolve, prioritizing communication and oral proficiency, culminating in the 'Reform Movement.' This shift embraced methodologies such as the Direct Method, which rigorously excluded the use of students' first languages (L1) in classrooms (Cook, 2010). The Direct Method established an immersion-based framework that minimized the role of L1 in language learning.

In the wake of World War II, the emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach reinforced this trend, emphasizing "meaningful input in L2 through exposure to L2 in realistic situations" (Machida, 2011, p. 741). Consequently, the use of L1 became further constrained. Nevertheless, recent scholarship (e.g., Cook, 2010; Laviosa, 2014) advocates for the reintegration of Translation in Language Teaching (TILT) into contemporary pedagogical practices. Laviosa (2014) identifies three plausible dimensions advocating for translation: theoretical underpinnings, second language acquisition (SLA) research on translation effectiveness, and the development of innovative translation-based teaching methodologies.

1.1 Historical Context and Critiques of Translation

Even amidst the communicative era, translation retained its utility for clarifying grammatical rules and providing contextual examples (Carreres, 2006). The period from 1940 to 1960 witnessed the prominence of Contrastive Analysis, which aimed to explain learner errors by juxtaposing two languages (Keshavarz, 1999). Lado (1957) asserted that the similarities between a learner's L1 and the target language facilitate learning (p. 2). However, the rise of Error Analysis in the 1960s challenged this notion, attributing learner mistakes to various factors beyond L1, including overgeneralization and motivation (Keshavarz, 1999; Shastri, 2010). Schachter (1974) critiqued Contrastive Analysis for its predictive focus on learner behavior, which often overlooked actual linguistic performance (p. 206). In contrast, Broughton et al. (2002) observed that most errors cannot be traced back to mother tongue interference (p. 136).

As EFL classrooms have diversified, the traditional monolingual approach has faced increasing scrutiny. Diverse teaching methodologies, from the Direct Method to task-based learning, often embrace a restrictive view of L1 usage (Howatt, 1984). Many methodologies advocate for bans on L1 use in favor of target language immersion, a perspective rooted in Krashen's (1981) theory of language acquisition, which postulates that foreign language learning should mimic first language acquisition, thereby necessitating a reduction in L1 use. Brown (1994)

supports this position, stating that subconscious language acquisition is most effective when learners interact exclusively in the second language (L2).

Recent research, however, indicates a shift in EFL teaching paradigms, acknowledging the pedagogical advantages of incorporating L1, particularly when educators share a common linguistic background with their students. Atkinson (1993) notes that traditional methodologies faced scant critique when students came from varied linguistic backgrounds, as the absence of a shared language limited the use of L1. Researchers, such as Medgyes (1994), argue that a monolingual stance is 'untenable,' emphasizing the instructional benefits of harnessing L1 in EFL settings. Auerbach (1993) further explains the potential advantages of employing L1, such as enhanced classroom management, improved understanding of complex concepts, and increased learner engagement.

1.2 L1 Use in EFL Contexts in Saudi Arabia

The importance of English as a skill for academic and professional success in Saudi Arabia enhances the significance of translation within the region's EFL contexts. Empirical research conducted by Alhazmi and Poarch (2018) illustrates that structured and systematic translation exercises can effectively engage students' L1 to alleviate anxiety and adopt self-efficacy in handling English materials. Recent studies show that translation is a key learning strategy for ESL/EFL students. It helps reduce anxiety, supports collaboration, aids memory, and encourages self-assessment (Al-Musawi, 2014; Arfianti & Widiati, 2020). Furthermore, many students see translation as useful for reading, writing, and vocabulary, but less for grammar and idioms (Al-Musawi, 2014). However, many participants expressed a lack of formal training in the practical application of translation strategies, emphasizing a need for educational frameworks that not only endorse translation but also instruct students on its practical applications.

1.3 Strategic Incorporation of L1 in EFL Classrooms

Recent investigations have highlighted the strategic integration of L1 within EFL classrooms, particularly with Arabic-speaking learners. Tiwari (2024) asserts that the subtle use of L1 significantly enhances comprehension, particularly for lower-level students, while also facilitating vocabulary acquisition. Concurrently, Badda (2024) claims that translation-based exercises not only improve reading comprehension skills but also boost student motivation and self-confidence, both of which are important for creating an engaging learning environment. Supporting these claims, Khelalfa (2023) provides strong evidence from Algerian EFL contexts, suggesting that educators view L1 as a vital component of effective teaching practices. This challenges the conventional "no-L1" policies frequently enforced in language classrooms.

Literature acknowledges the transformative role of L1 in vocabulary acquisition. Badda (2022) notes that purposeful translation strategies significantly enhance comprehension among female Arabic learners, a sentiment echoed by Alaboud (2022), who demonstrated that translation markedly improves reading skills for female EFL learners. Alazemi et al. (2021) argue that employing L1 in EFL contexts aids not only comprehension and lecture retention but also enhances learner engagement. Nevertheless, students advocate for a balanced approach that minimizes excessive reliance on Arabic to secure a comprehensive understanding of English grammar and content. Boustani (2020) highlights that L1 utilization can enhance vocabulary understanding among adult EFL learners, with participants who employ L1 strategies exhibiting superior performance compared to their peers who rely solely on L2.

1.4 Proficiency Levels and Attitudes Toward L1 Use

Interestingly, attitudes toward L1 usage in EFL classrooms reveal significant variation based on proficiency levels. Almohaimed and Almurshed (2018) found that while advanced learners generally expressed opposition to L1 use, elementary and intermediate students favored its strategic application, particularly for comprehending vocabulary and complex ideas. Al-Ahdal and Aljabr (2023) advocate for a balanced approach, recognizing the cognitive advantages L1 offers while cautioning against potential drawbacks to L2 fluency. This observation highlights the necessity for instructional strategies that are finely tuned to accommodate varying proficiency levels.

1.5 Students' Beliefs and Perceptions About Translation in EFL Classrooms

Students' beliefs and perceptions regarding L1 and translation play a central role in shaping their language learning experiences. Research indicates that learners often view translation as a practical strategy for improving comprehension and facilitating effective communication (Bagarić & Djigunović, 2007). Students frequently engage in translation to decipher meanings and generate language throughout productive tasks (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Diab (2010) discovered that students who perceive translation as advantageous tend to incorporate it into their study routines, regarding it as a strategic tool that complements other methods, thereby solidifying their language knowledge. This positive perception might relate to increased confidence in their language abilities and improved academic performance, further reinforcing the need for EFL curricula that align with students' beliefs surrounding translation.

Moreover, learners' beliefs about language learning significantly influence their acquisition processes. According to Horwitz (1988), these beliefs shape learners' motivations, engagement levels, and choice of learning strategies. Students who view language learning as communicative and interactive processes are more likely to adopt proactive strategies, such as translation, to aid in comprehension and retention. Graham and Macaro (2008) emphasize that cultivating positive learner beliefs correlates with greater persistence and success, highlighting the importance of embedding such beliefs within language instruction.

1.6 Theoretical Frameworks of Translation

Theoretical frameworks supporting the role of translation further highlight its pedagogical potential. The Skopos Theory, proposed by Vermeer (1989), asserts that a translation's purpose should dictate its methodology, seamlessly aligning with EFL practices. This theory frames translation as not merely a linguistic task but a critical communication tool across varied contexts. Additionally, the Interlanguage Theory, introduced by Selinker (1972), clarifies the transitional linguistic systems learners develop, influenced by both their L1 and L2. This perspective supports the effective integration of translation activities, enabling learners to navigate between languages and develop a unique linguistic identity while deepening their understanding of both languages.

Recent studies in applied linguistics emphasize the significant role of translation in language learning, challenging the perception of translation as an outdated reliance on GTM. Macaro (2001) contends that engaging in translation enhances students' interactions with vocabulary and grammar, prompting them to engage with language structures in meaningful contexts. Although educators have often overlooked the importance of L1 in foreign language instruction, research reveals that learners instinctively rely on their L1 when acquiring new languages (Chamot et al., 1987; Naiman et al., 1978). Contemporary post-communicative approaches emphasize the benefits of integrating translation into foreign language classrooms, encouraging learners to address both structures and meanings while engaging in in-depth discussions about linguistic and non-linguistic fundamentals.

1.7 Teachers' Perceptions of Translation Use in EFL Classrooms

Educators' perceptions of translation essentially shape their instructional practices. Teachers who recognize the potential of translation are more likely to utilize it as an effective tool for bridging gaps in student understanding (Borg, 2017; Alghanmi & Shukri, 2016). Although some educators acknowledge the advantages of translation for vocabulary acquisition and grammatical comprehension, others express concerns regarding possible interference from the mother tongue and classroom efficiency (Cook, 2001; Ellis, 2008). In contrast, research by Ibrahim (2021) highlights that teachers who view translation favorably incorporate it more frequently, thereby cultivating enriched language learning environments catering to diverse student needs.

Al-Shahrani (2019) reveals that many Saudi EFL instructors recognize the merits of translation but hesitate to fully implement it due to adherence to educational paradigms that prioritize communicative competence over traditional methods. This contradiction highlights a significant gap in the literature; while the benefits of translation are recognized, research focusing on its effective integration within a communicative framework remains limited. Addressing this void could enhance teacher training and professional development aimed at refining and polishing teaching practices.

1.8 Translation as a Learning Strategy

The strategic application of translation is increasingly recognized as a valuable technique for facilitating comprehension and retention. Research indicates that teachers' strategic use of learners' L1, through code-switching, reduces cognitive load and aids learning by maintaining attention focus (Guo, 2007; Cook & Hall, 2012; Levine, 2003). As a cognitive facilitator, translation promotes deeper cognitive processing and memory reinforcement through comparative analysis (Liao, 2016). Leonardi (2011) suggests that translation serves as a bridge across cultures, highlighting its role as a cognitive activity.

Further supporting this view, Melvin (2015) demonstrates that engagement with translation tasks can yield improved performance on assessments, reflecting both linguistic proficiency and strategic competence. Translation can thus serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in foreign language instruction when integrated systematically. Al-Amri and Abdul-Raof (2014) argue that translation activities focusing on L2 learning can effectively minimize both interlanguage effects and cross-linguistic influence from L1. By embedding translation strategies into EFL instruction, educators empower students to develop personalized learning frameworks that align with their individual learning styles, thereby improving fluency while constructively employing their L1 to support L2 development.

The existing literature sheds light on the complex interplay among learners' beliefs, teachers' perceptions, and the implementation of translation strategies in EFL classrooms. As both educators and students increasingly recognize the value of translation, its integration into language pedagogy becomes increasingly justified, reinforcing its crucial role as a transformative instrument for acquiring proficiency in English as a foreign language. Future research should prioritize the development of effective methodologies for integrating translation across diverse EFL contexts, along with assessments of their long-term impacts on language acquisition. Such explorations may promise to pave the way for instructional practices that align with the realities of current classrooms, ultimately benefiting the broader field of language education.

Exploring students' beliefs and perceptions about translation in Saudi Arabian EFL classrooms is crucial for enhancing language instruction in this context. As English becomes increasingly essential for academic and professional success, understanding how students use translation can inform strategies that improve comprehension and boost confidence. Given the unique linguistic dynamics—where Arabic is dominant, but English is essential—insights into learners' experiences can help educators tailor approaches that effectively integrate L1 support. Additionally, examining teachers' views on translation will shed light on pedagogical practices that can either facilitate or inhibit language learning. In retrospect, this research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications, thereby contributing to more effective language education in Saudi Arabia.

1.9 Research Questions

RQ1. How do learners perceive the use of translation in enhancing their English language learning?

RQ2. What are students' beliefs regarding the use of translation to learn English?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the use of translation as a pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms?

2. Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore teachers' and learners' perceptions regarding the use of L1 and translation strategies as pedagogical tools in EFL classrooms. The philosophical underpinning of this research is primarily aligned with constructivism, which posits that individuals actively construct their understanding and knowledge through experiences and social interactions. This paradigm emphasizes the subjective nature of learning and teaching, acknowledging that beliefs, experiences, and perceptions significantly shape the educational process (Creswell, 2014). Utilizing a mixed-methods approach allows for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics involved in language teaching and learning.

2.1 Quantitative Data Collection Tools

To facilitate an understanding of perceptions surrounding the utility of translation, two inventories were employed to collect quantitative data.

2.1.1 Inventory for Beliefs about Translation (IBT)

The IBT was developed to evaluate the perceptions of both educators and learners regarding the role and efficacy of translation in language learning contexts. This instrument is crucial as it directly assesses the beliefs that significantly influence pedagogical practices and learning outcomes (Macaro, 2001; Cook, 2010). Grounded in constructivist theory, the IBT recognizes that individuals bring their existing knowledge and experiences into the learning environment, which shapes their interpretation of the role of translation in their education.

Further aligning the IBT with existing research, studies such as Alhazmi and Poarch (2018) highlight the significance of exploring attitudes toward translation in EFL environments. These studies emphasize the value of translation as a tool for vocabulary acquisition and grammar comprehension, supporting the need for a comprehensive understanding of beliefs to enhance teaching practices.

2.1.2 Inventory for Translation as a Learning Strategy (ITLS)

Complementing IBT, the ITLS was explicitly designed to evaluate learners' strategic use of translation in their learning processes. Rooted in the principles of constructivism, the ITLS emphasizes the importance of learner agency and strategic autonomy in the acquisition of language. Drawing from strategies identified in research by Graham and Macaro (2008), this instrument aims to measure the frequency and context of translation strategies used by learners. Evidence from studies, such as Melvin's (2015), indicates that active engagement in translation tasks can lead to improved learner performance, reinforcing the importance of examining learners' perceptions and strategies within this framework.

2.1.3 Qualitative Data Collection Tool

To enrich the quantitative data, semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with educators. This qualitative component allowed for an in-depth exploration of educators' perceptions regarding the use of translation in EFL classrooms. The rationale for using focus group interviews lies in their capacity to capture the complex and contextually rich understandings of educators' experiences and beliefs about translation as a pedagogical tool. By providing an open dialogue within a guided framework, these interviews aligned with qualitative research methodologies (Creswell, 2014) and adhered to the constructivist emphasis on personal narratives and social interactions in the construction of knowledge.

2.4 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Tools

The combination of the IBT and ITLS questionnaires with focus group interviews facilitated a comprehensive examination of the research inquiries. This integration reflects the understanding that quantitative data identifies patterns and trends, while qualitative data offers the necessary context and intricacies for a more comprehensive interpretation of findings. The dual approach not only improves the vigor of the research but also embodies constructivist principles, suggesting that meaning is constructed through the interplay of diverse perspectives and experiences.

2.5 Sampling Procedures

A purposive cluster sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide meaningful insights into the use of translation as a pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms. This approach enhances data richness by ensuring that participants possess relevant experience, which is essential for capturing diverse perspectives within a constructivist framework.

The sample consisted of 60 university students and three educators from a private university, selected based on the criteria that students be actively enrolled in an EFL classroom and educators possess a minimum of two years of experience teaching EFL. This selection rationale emphasizes that both groups are well-positioned to share critical insights regarding their attitudes and the pedagogical implications of using translation strategies in the classroom.

To further enrich the qualitative analysis, focus group interviews were conducted with a purposively chosen subset of 10 students. This method capitalizes on group dynamics to generate in-depth discussions, revealing varied opinions and responses regarding the role of translation in language learning. By employing purposive sampling, the study aims to produce a detailed and contextually grounded understanding of participant experiences and perceptions, thereby contributing significantly to the discourse on effective EFL pedagogies.

2.5.1 Participants

This study involved two participant groups: a cohort of 60 undergraduate males (47%) and females (53%) students aged 18 to 25 enrolled in English language courses, representing a spectrum of proficiency levels. To enhance data triangulation, qualitative insights were obtained through focus group interviews with 10 students, comprising 5 participants from Year 1 and 5 from Year 2.

Additionally, the research incorporated perspectives from three educators who teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL), each possessing advanced degrees (master's or PhD) in TESOL, Translation, and linguistics. This diverse participant composition facilitated a comprehensive exploration of both students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the utilization of translation tools within EFL classrooms.

2.5.2 Context

This research was conducted at a private university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The study participants were drawn from two distinct groups of students within the university.

The first group consisted of Year 1 students who were enrolled in the Preparatory Year (Prep Year) program. This program is designed to prepare students for their academic studies in the medical field.

The second group consisted of Year 2 students, who were in their first year of medical school. A key characteristic of this group is that they are studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This means that English is not their native language, and they are learning it specifically for academic and professional purposes within their medical studies.

2.5.3 Reliability and Validation

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaires, Cronbach's alpha coefficient analysis was performed on data collected from a pilot group. Acceptable alpha values range from 0.70 to 0.95 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The IBT yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.831 (Figure 1), while the ITLS produced a coefficient of 0.935 (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Reliability Coefficient IBT

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.855	.831	23

Figure 2. Reliability Coefficient ITLS

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.935	.935	26

These high reliability scores indicate that both instruments are appropriate for use in the main study. Such rigorous testing is essential for ensuring that the findings are rigorous and yield valid insights into the perceptions surrounding translation in EFL contexts, ultimately contributing to a richer understanding of language teaching and learning informed by a constructivist framework.

2.6 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period, utilizing both paper-based and online questionnaires to accommodate participants' preferences. Educators were invited to participate during departmental meetings, while students completed the questionnaires during designated class periods, thereby ensuring widespread accessibility. In addition to these methods, focus group interviews with teachers were conducted at their convenience, facilitating in-depth qualitative insights and encouraging reflective discussions about their experiences with translation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

The combination of the International Beliefs about Translation (IBT) and the Inventory of Translation as a Teaching Strategy (ITLS) questionnaire, alongside the focus group interviews, enabled a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. The quantitative instruments provided numerical data that captured the beliefs of both teachers and learners. At the same time, the qualitative interviews enhanced the findings by offering rich narratives that explained the underlying reasons for these beliefs.

2.7 Ethical Procedures

This study adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) and was conducted in accordance with institutional review board (IRB) requirements. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were provided with clear, written information outlining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without fear of reprisal or negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were maintained throughout the research process. The University's Deanship of Scientific Research approved this study, ensuring that it met the highest standards of ethical research practices. Notably, the research received no external funding, eliminating any potential conflicts of interest.

2.8 Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed using SPSS version 25, while the interview data underwent thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software. This qualitative analysis involved the systematic coding of responses to identify key patterns and emerging themes. By integrating quantitative insights from the questionnaires with qualitative insights derived from the interviews, this two-fold methodological approach provided an inclusive understanding of the research topic, greatly enriching the overall findings.

3. Results

This section presents the main results from both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings show differences in students' and teachers' attitudes toward translation and the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. Quantitative data highlights variations between Year 1 and Year 2 students, while qualitative insights provide context on how these attitudes influence learning and teaching practices.

3.1 Attitudes Towards the Use of Translation in the EFL Classroom

3.1.1 Quantitative Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the quantitative data collected during the study. It focuses on examining students' responses to identify patterns and differences related to the use of translation and L1 in the EFL classroom. The analysis aims to uncover trends in attitudes, perceptions, and strategies across different groups, providing a statistical foundation for understanding how translation and L1 use influence language learning experiences.

3.1.2 Descriptive Analysis of IBT

The participants provided their responses to the IBT items using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, which reflected their level of agreement with statements related to their beliefs about translation.

The data indicate a slight shift in students' views on the use of Arabic translation for learning English over a two-year period. In Year 1, students believed that translation was essential for understanding reading and completing assignments, with a mean score of around 3.75. By Year 2, these scores had dropped significantly to approximately 2.39, suggesting an increase in their confidence and a decrease in their reliance on translation. Students also began to prefer instruction solely in English, acknowledging that translation could impede their progress. This trend implies a positive shift towards greater immersion in the English language.

Year 1

In Year 1, students displayed a strong belief in using Arabic translation as a tool to facilitate their English learning. The data shows that the highest mean score (4.19) was for the statement about using Arabic translation to finish English assignments more quickly and save time. This suggests that, at the outset, students viewed translation as a practical shortcut to managing their workload efficiently. Similarly, high mean scores were observed for statements about translation aiding in understanding spoken English (4.16) and writing English compositions (4.09). These results indicate that translation was perceived as a valuable support mechanism for both receptive (listening, reading) and productive (writing) language skills.

Other items, such as recalling lesson content and reducing the amount of English input, also received a mean score just above 4.0, reinforcing the idea that translation was viewed as a helpful bridge in the learning process. On the other hand, the lowest mean (2.06) was for the statement "Translating does not help me progress in learning English," showing that students disagreed with the notion that translation was unhelpful. Another low score (2.59) was for the preference that teachers use only English, indicating a clear comfort with bilingual support. The remaining items, with means ranging from 3.6 to 3.9, reflect moderate but positive attitudes toward translation for vocabulary, interaction, and grammar.

Year 2

By Year 2, a noticeable shift in attitudes emerged. The overall means for most translation-related learning strategies declined, especially for those that positioned translation as a shortcut in the classroom. The most striking change was the drop in mean scores for using translation to understand textbook readings, interact with classmates, or memorize vocabulary, falling to 2.39, the lowest group mean. This suggests that, as students progressed, they began to perceive less value in translation for these basic tasks, possibly due to increased confidence and proficiency in English.

However, the data also reveals a new pattern: the highest mean in Year 2 (4.21) was for the statement that translation helps with learning English idioms and phrases. This was closely followed by high means for statements about frustration when thinking in English (4.14), the impact of translation on English input (4.11), and the belief that it is best to keep Arabic out of mind when using English (4.04). These results indicate that, while students became less dependent on translation for routine classroom activities, they still found it essential for tackling more complex language features, such as idioms, and for managing cognitive load. The persistence of high frustration scores also suggests that, despite progress, students continued to face challenges in thinking directly in English, leading them to rely on translation in moments of difficulty.

Comparison of Year 1 and Year 2 Students

A comparative analysis was conducted to examine how attitudes toward translation differ between first-year and second-year EFL learners. The results indicate that first-year students ($n = 28$, $M = 3.704$, $SD = 1.238$) hold more favorable beliefs about the use of translation in language learning than their second-year peers ($n = 32$, $M = 3.065$, $SD = 1.329$), with a mean difference of 0.639 points. This difference was assessed using an independent samples t-test, which approached but did not reach conventional statistical significance ($t(58) = 1.918$, $p = .060$). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from -0.025 to 1.303, suggesting that while the true difference could plausibly be zero, the trend is noteworthy (See Table 1). Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variances ($F = 0.234$, $p = .630$), supporting the validity of the analysis. The effect size, measured by Cohen's d , was 0.50 (95% CI: -0.03, 1.02), indicating a moderate and potentially meaningful difference in attitudes between the two groups (See Table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Comparing First-year (n=28) and Second Year (n=32) Students' Attitudes Towards Translation

Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
First-year	28	3.704	1.238	0.234	3.201	4.207
Second-year	32	3.065	1.329	0.235	2.577	3.553

Note: Mean difference = 0.639, SE difference = 0.333

95% CI for mean difference: (-0.025, 1.303)

Table 2. Inferential Statistics

Analysis	Statistic	df/CI Lower	p/CI Upper
Independent t-test	1.918	58	0.06
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	0.496	-0.028	1.02

Note: Levene's test for equality of variances (F = 0.234, p = .630) confirmed homogeneity of variances between groups.

These findings suggest that as students advance in their English studies, their reliance on and positive perceptions of translation as a learning tool tend to decrease. This shift may reflect growing confidence in direct language use or increased exposure to alternative learning strategies in the second year. Although statistical evidence falls just short of the conventional threshold for significance, the moderate effect size and the proximity of the p-value to .05 highlight a trend that could be practically relevant. Overall, these results may shed light on the importance of considering year-level differences when designing EFL curricula.

3.2.1 The Use of Translation Strategies in the EFL Classroom

The second tool employed to investigate students' use of translation strategies in the EFL classroom among Year 1 and Year 2 students is ITLS. This questionnaire aims to gather insights into the students' preferences for utilizing translation techniques during their language learning process.

3.2.2 Descriptive Analysis of ITLS

Year One Students

For Year 1 students, the data reveal a firm reliance on translation strategies in the EFL classroom. The most frequently used strategy is "using Arabic subtitles" when watching English media, with a mean of 4.68, indicating that nearly all first-year students depend on this approach to aid comprehension. Other highly used strategies include memorizing new English vocabulary by remembering its Arabic translation (mean = 4.50) and clarifying differences between Arabic and English through translation (mean = 3.96). These high means suggest that translation is a central part of the learning process for beginners. On the other hand, the least used strategy among Year 1 students is consulting an English-Arabic dictionary, which has a mean of just 1.57. This low score may indicate that students either prefer other translation tools or rely more on direct translation and subtitles rather than dictionary use. Another strategy with a low mean is "asking about how an Arabic expression can be translated into English" (mean = 1.96), suggesting that students are less likely to seek explicit translation help for specific expressions.

Table 3. Translation Strategies Used with the Highest Mean (Year 1)

Item (Abbreviated)	Mean	SD
Watch English TV/movies with Arabic subtitles	4.68	0.81
Memorize English vocab with Arabic translation	4.50	0.58
Pre-read/listen to English scripts	4.46	1.07
Translate English utterances into Arabic when listening	3.50	1.26
Use Arabic translation to check comprehension after reading	3.75	1.62

Year Two Students

In contrast, there is a noticeable shift in strategy use. The highest mean is now found in "writing Arabic translations in English textbooks" (mean = 4.28), which is a significant increase compared to Year 1. This suggests that as students progress, they may use written translation as a study aid rather than relying on real-time translation for comprehension. However, most other strategies see a marked decrease in use. For example, "using Arabic subtitles" drops dramatically to a mean of 1.66, making it the least used strategy among Year 2 students. This sharp decline suggests that as students become more proficient, they rely less on immediate translation and more on direct engagement with the English language. Other strategies with low means include "asking about Arabic-to-English translation" (mean = 1.69) and "using English-Arabic dictionaries" (mean = 1.69), reinforcing the trend away from translation-based reliance (See Table 4). Consequently, year two students are likely showing greater confidence and a move toward greater autonomy in language use, indicating progress in becoming more comfortable with English as their primary means of communication.

Table 4. Translation Strategies Used with the Highest Mean (Year 2)

Item (Abbreviated)	Mean	SD
Write Arabic translations in English textbooks.	4.28	1.46
Use Arabic translation to check comprehension after reading.	3.47	1.76
Pre-read/listen to English scripts.	3.47	1.74
Try to grasp the meaning in English without Arabic equivalents.	3.56	1.48
Use Arabic news to understand English news.	3.44	1.66

Comparison of Year 1 and Year 2 Students

A comparative statistical analysis was conducted to examine differences in translation strategy usage between Year 1 (n = 28) and Year 2 (n = 32) EFL students. The results revealed a marked progression in language learning strategies as students advanced in their studies (See Table 5). Year 1 students reported a higher mean usage of translation strategies (M = 3.46, SD = 0.69) compared to Year 2 students (M = 2.41, SD = 0.57).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics: Comparing First-Year and Second-Year Students' Use of Translation Strategies

Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
First-year	28	3.46	0.69	0.13	3.19	3.73
Second-year	32	2.41	0.57	0.1	2.2	2.62

Notes: Mean difference = 1.05, SE difference = 0.16; 95% CI for mean difference: (0.72, 1.38)

The error bars (See Figure 3), representing standard deviations, indicate that not only do Year 2 students rely less on translation strategies, but their responses are also more consistent, suggesting a more uniform approach to language learning at the advanced level.

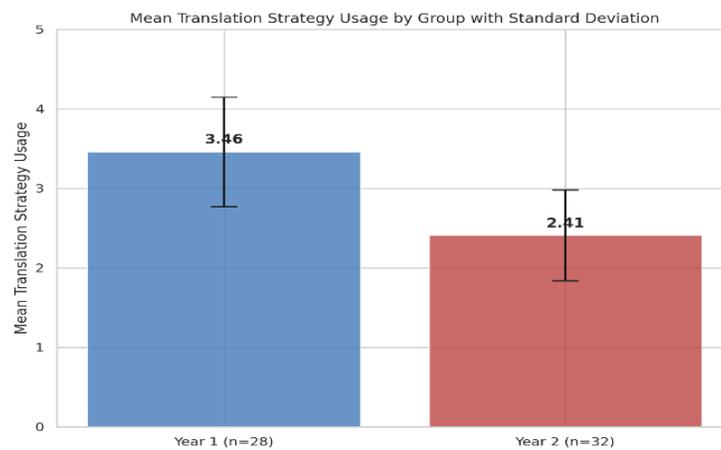


Figure 3. Mean Translation Strategy Usage by Group with Standard Deviation

The inferential statistical analysis provides evidence of the significance of these differences. An independent samples t-test yielded a significant result ($t = 6.37, p < 0.001$), indicating that the observed differences between Year 1 and Year 2 are highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. The extent of this difference is further quantified by Cohen's $d = 1.66$, which indicates a large effect size according to conventional interpretations (Cohen's guidelines: small = 0.2, medium = 0.5, large = 0.8). This substantial effect size suggests that the difference in translation strategy usage between years is not only statistically significant but also meaningful in an educational context (See Table 6). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference (0.67, 1.43) provides additional support for the reliability of these findings. This interval indicates that we can be 95% confident that the true population means difference in strategy usage between Year 1 and Year 2 falls within this range. The fact that this interval does not include zero further confirms the statistical significance of the observed differences.

Table 6. Inferential Statistics for Group Comparison

Analysis	Statistic	df / CI Lower	p / CI Upper
Independent t-test	$t = 6.37$	df = 54.8	$p < .001$
Effect Size (Cohen's d)	1.67	0.72	1.38

Note: Levene's test statistics = 0.85, df = 1, p = 0.36.

These findings provide evidence for substantial differences between Year 1 and Year 2 students in their use of translation strategies. The

analysis shows that Year 2 students employ significantly fewer translation strategies and demonstrate greater consistency in their approach compared to Year 1 students. This pattern suggests that as students advance to Year 2, they adopt more direct engagement with the target language, reflecting increased confidence and autonomy in their learning process. The strength and consistency of these results highlight the significant differences in strategy use between the two-year groups in the EFL learning context.

3.3 *Qualitative Analysis of Students' Attitudes Toward First Language Use in English as a Foreign Language Classrooms: Theme and Results*

3.3.1 Students' Focus Interviews

The qualitative analysis, conducted using NVivo, complemented the quantitative findings and allowed for a deeper understanding and exploration of students' attitudes and strategies regarding their use of their first language (L1) in the EFL classroom. This analysis was based on data from focus group interviews, during which distinct themes and trends emerged, illustrating the evolution of students' perspectives from their first to their second year of EFL instruction.

Reliance on First Language (L1)

Throughout their first year, students often turned to their L1 for understanding and vocabulary acquisition. One student expressed this reliance:

"When I learn new words in English, I first need to know how to say it in my language to really understand."

In addition, L1 was frequently used for clarification of idiomatic expressions and complex grammatical structures:

"Using my language helps me make sense of grammar, and it also helps in remembering the rules."

In contrast, by their second year, participants reported a noticeable decrease in their dependence on L1, opting instead to engage more directly with English. A second-year student reflected,

"Sometimes I still use my language, but I try to practice English as much as I can," highlighting their growing awareness of the necessity to think and communicate in English to improve proficiency:

"I realize that if I want to improve, I need to think and talk in English more often."

Learning Strategies

In their first year, students frequently sought assistance from teachers and peers to facilitate their learning. A participant stated,

"I ask the teacher to explain things in our language when I don't get it, especially with vocabulary."

This trend of using L1 for clarifying complex grammar and vocabulary was common. However, by the second year, students exhibited greater self-sufficiency in their learning strategies, utilizing resources such as mobile dictionaries and English-language media. One student noted,

"I look up words on my phone or ask a classmate how to say something in English instead of switching back to my language."

Moreover, students reported using English media, such as watching movies without subtitles, to enhance their listening comprehension. A participant shared,

"I started to watch English movies without subtitles. At first, it was hard, but now I understand a lot more of the conversations."

Peer Interaction

During their first year, students showed a preference for interacting in their L1 with friends, finding comfort in the familiarity of their native language. However, in year two, a shift in behavior was evident as students actively engaged in English conversations with peers during breaks and in extracurricular activities. One student mentioned,

"I sometimes speak English with my friends during our break so we can all practice together," highlighting their growing confidence.

Confidence Level

Initially, students expressed anxiety about making mistakes while speaking English, reflecting low confidence levels. One student admitted,

"I'm always worried about making mistakes when I speak English."

By their second year, however, this perspective evolved. Students began to view mistakes as natural and integral to the learning process. A participant encapsulated this shift, stating,

"I don't mind making mistakes anymore; it's part of learning," which might indicate a more confident and growth-oriented mindset. Over the two years, students demonstrated significant growth in their language learning journey. They progressed from a heavy reliance on their L1 toward a more confident use of English, showing enhanced self-reliance in learning strategies, increased peer interaction in English, and an acceptance of mistakes as a critical aspect of their educational process. This alignment between students' reported beliefs and the statistical results provides evidence that as students advance, they become more independent and confident English users, with translation playing a diminishing role in their learning journey.

3.3.2 Teacher Focus Group Interview: Themes and Results

A focus group interview involving three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers was conducted to gain insight into their perceptions and strategies regarding the use of L1 in EFL settings. The aim was to explore the ways teachers manage L1 usage, address student reliance on L1, and create a supportive environment for English language acquisition. Below are the key themes that emerged from the focus group discussion, along with their implications.

Managing L1 Use

Teachers recognized the necessity of balancing English promotion with student support, indicating a need for context-sensitive strategies. They acknowledged L1 as a valuable tool for facilitating understanding in English learning. One teacher emphasized,

"We have to find a balance that supports learning without limiting it."

Another noted the effective use of L1 for clarifying complex concepts:

"Using the students' first language can help explain challenging grammar rules."

Addressing Student Reliance on L1

Teachers understood that students inevitably lean on their native language, and they aim to minimize this reliance through targeted teaching strategies. The teachers collectively acknowledged that initial dependence on L1 is a normal phase in language acquisition:

"Reducing reliance on L1 should be gradual and respectful of their learning process."

Another teacher highlighted the significance of providing ample opportunities for English practice to decrease L1 dependence:

"We need activities that push them to use English more effectively."

Nurturing an English-Dominated Environment

The teachers aimed to promote an environment that prioritized English, suggesting that clear policies and strong support from the school administration are essential for creating immersive English-language experiences. One teacher mentioned:

"Establishing an English-only policy helps create an immersive experience."

Challenges and Limitations

The instructors openly discussed the complexities of promoting English in EFL classrooms, highlighting the necessity for flexible teaching approaches that accommodate diverse learner needs. One teacher shared,

"It's tough when we have advanced and beginner students in the same class," indicating the challenges of implementing an English-only practice in heterogeneous classrooms.

Professional Development

Continuous professional development was a recurring theme in the conversations among teachers, who expressed the need for ongoing training to enhance their instructional methods and stay current with contemporary research-based teaching practices. One teacher stated,

"We need workshops on effective strategies for managing L1 use in diverse classrooms."

The collective input from teachers highlights an in-depth understanding of the interaction between L1 and English in the language learning context. While they emphasized the importance of nurturing an English-speaking environment, they also recognized the necessity of respecting students' initial reliance on their L1. Striking the right balance between promoting English usage and using L1 for comprehension is critical to supporting student linguistic growth. Moreover, the challenges presented by heterogeneous classrooms highlight the complexity of enforcing an English-only policy, underscoring the need for effective strategies paired with institutional support to navigate these obstacles effectively. Teachers' calls for professional development illustrate their commitment to continuous improvement in their teaching practices, ensuring they are aligned with effective, evidence-based methodologies.

4. Discussion

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses offer insights into the shifting perceptions of translation use in the EFL classroom. Notably, Year 1 students exhibited a more positive attitude towards the use of translation (with a mean score of 3.704), whereas Year 2 students showed a lower reliance (mean of 3.065). This divergence not only illustrates distinct developmental phases in language acquisition but also emphasizes the need for teaching strategies attached to these evolving learner profiles.

4.1 Transforming Attitudes Towards Translation

The initial enthusiasm observed among Year 1 students suggests that translation serves as a critical bridge between their native Arabic and the complexities of English. This observation aligns with Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory, which describes the learner's reliance on L1 as a natural and transitional phase in acquiring a second language. It further supports the findings of Pereyra, A., & Ivanov, K. (2022), which suggest that L1 is essentially used as a facilitator in the EFL classroom. In contrast, the lower scores for Year 2 students indicate a deliberate move towards greater linguistic autonomy. Their desire to "think and speak directly in English" reflects a cognitive shift consistent with the principles of Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1989), where the purpose and context of language use drive methodological choices. In line with this conception, Leonardi (2011) suggests that translation serves as a bridge across cultures,

highlighting its role as a cognitive activity. Furthermore, the reliance on translation to enhance understanding and improve retention among both groups is a finding that echoes the importance of translation in improving comprehension and retention among learners (Guo, 2007; Cook & Hall, 2012; Levine, 2003).

In addition, the qualitative findings reveal that while Year 1 students depend on translation to clarify grammatical structures, improve retention, and enhance understanding, Year 2 students gradually shift toward more direct engagement with the target language. This progression validates recent calls in the literature (Cook, 2010; Laviosa, 2014) for a balanced, dynamic use of translation in language teaching that addresses both comprehension and communicative competence.

4.2 Enhanced Learning Strategies

The evolution in learning strategies is further evident in students' adaptive behaviors, such as moving from teacher-dependent clarifications to using mobile resources and English media. This transformation supports the findings of Melvin (2015) and Bader (2024), who noted that strategic use of translation tools can catalyze learner autonomy and facilitate a more resilient language development process.

Moreover, the gradual change in attitudes toward mistakes—from anxiety in Year 1 to acceptance in Year 2—aligns with Horwitz's (1988), Lababidi's (2016), and Diab's (2010) perspectives on the positive role of error tolerance in language acquisition. By recognizing errors as part of the learning process, students cultivate a more supportive and risk-tolerant classroom environment that fosters experimentation and growth.

4.3 Educators' Insights and Teaching Strategies

Teachers, as revealed by focus group discussions, are acutely aware of the pedagogical necessity to balance L1 use with the immersion required for mastering English, which aligns with the findings of Pereyra & Ivanov (2022), Khelalfa (2023), and Al-Ahdal & Aljabr (2023). This duality in approach resonates with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as outlined by Machida (2011) and the balanced perspectives suggested by Atkinson (1993) and Medgyes (1994). Their proactive strategies—integrating translation where it enhances comprehension while maintaining an English-rich environment—mirror the recommendations of Auerbach (1993) and Al-Amri and Abdul-Raof (2014). The teachers' narrative reinforces their concerns regarding possible mother tongue interference and classroom pedagogical efficacy.

The consistent emphasis on professional development further emphasizes the commitment to refining these teaching methodologies. Teachers expressed a clear need for targeted training and support on effective L1 management strategies, which aligns closely with the ongoing discourse in the literature (Huang & Eskey, 1999; Ibrahim, 2021; Copland & Neokleous, 2011) on the evolution of language pedagogies in mixed-ability classrooms.

5. Limitations of the Study

It is important to acknowledge several limitations of this study. The small sample size, comprising sixty students and three educators from a single private university in Saudi Arabia, means the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples across different educational settings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported measures may introduce biases, as participants may respond in socially desirable ways. Incorporating observational studies could provide a more objective understanding of classroom practices. Finally, the short data collection timeframe may not capture shifts in perceptions over time, suggesting that longitudinal studies of the same cohort would be beneficial.

6. Recommendations or Implications

Based on the findings discussed, several recommendations can be made to enhance EFL instruction through the effective use of translation strategies. First, EFL educators should engage in ongoing professional development that focuses on effective translation strategies, emphasizing the appropriate contexts for using L1 in instruction and balancing its use with direct English exposure to augment overall language proficiency (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Cook, 2010; Lavois, 2014). Furthermore, future research should investigate how different educational contexts influence perceptions of translation and examine the impact of specific translation tasks on key language skills, including vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Policymakers should adopt a flexible approach to integrating translation into EFL classrooms, recognizing it as a valuable instructional strategy that can improve language learning outcomes and nurture a more inclusive learning environment. Finally, educators should strategically incorporate translation activities that gradually guide students from reliance on their L1 to increased proficiency in English, using scaffolding techniques to promote connections between languages and build confidence in their language abilities (Alhazmi & Poarch, 2018). By implementing these recommendations, EFL educators and policymakers can effectively utilize translation as a tool to create more effective language learning experiences, ultimately leading to enhanced language proficiency for students.

7. Conclusion

This study highlights the important role that translation plays in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Saudi Arabia. The exploration of perspectives from both students and teachers regarding the use of Arabic translation reveals key opportunities for improving language learning outcomes. Differences in attitudes between Year 1 and Year 2 students illustrate how language learning evolves and emphasize the need for teaching strategies that adapt to learners' changing needs.

Additionally, maintaining a positive perspective on translation among educators is crucial, as this can help address the complexities of teaching a new language. Findings indicate that a balanced approach, which incorporates students' native language while progressively increasing exposure to English, can effectively support language development. According to Liao (2006), translation is beneficial in L2 learning by aiding comprehension, memory, idea expression, and reducing anxiety.

Future research should expand on these findings by including a wider range of participants to improve the generalizability of the results. Specifically, investigations into targeted translation techniques, their effectiveness in improving linguistic skills, and the long-lasting effects on students' ability to use English independently are recommended. Insights gained from this research can guide policy recommendations aimed at creating a flexible and inclusive teaching framework, ultimately enhancing EFL education in Saudi Arabia and similar settings.

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Authors' contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest or competing interests that could have influenced the outcomes or interpretations of this study. The research was carried out solely for academic and scholarly purposes, maintaining transparency and integrity throughout.

Ethics Approval

This study was conducted in strict accordance with ethical standards outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024). Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university hosting the study. The approval process involved a comprehensive review of the research design, consent procedures, and confidentiality measures, ensuring that all aspects of the study upheld the highest ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

Informed Consent

All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement in the study. They received comprehensive written information detailing the purpose of the research, procedures involved, and their rights as participants. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. All data collected were kept confidential, and steps were taken to ensure the anonymity of participants throughout the research process.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. Due to privacy restrictions that could compromise the confidentiality of research participants, the data is not publicly accessible.

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