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## ممارسات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية وتصوراتهم عن التناوب اللغوي في الفصول الدراسية في السعودية: تقييد استخدام اللغة العربية كأداة تعلم

### EFL Teachers' Practices and Perceptions of Translanguaging in Saudi Classrooms: Restricting the Use of Arabic as a Learning Tool

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#### ABSTRACT

The use of the first language (L1) in foreign language teaching has been widely debated and the body of literature in which the use of the first language is acknowledged and translanguaging is viewed as a tool for learning is worth considering. This qualitative study aimed to uncover a modest part of the interaction between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and students, namely EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of using the first language as a tool in English learning classes. To this end, two male and nine female EFL teachers working in government schools across Saudi Arabia were interviewed via Zoom to discuss their perceptions and practices. Five overarching themes emerged after analysis: the teacher would use Arabic in English classes only as a last resort. They unanimously reported that they use Arabic to teach specific content and some language components, namely grammar and vocabulary. Despite their reluctance to using L1, teachers find it necessary for explaining specific concepts. These practices of using students L1 contradicted their convictions. This can be attributed to policies that fostered teachers' scepticism and their unwillingness to acknowledge the benefits of translanguaging. In addition, the findings revealed that students' use of L1 in English language classrooms prompted a dismissive reaction from teachers, despite the latter's belief that translanguaging leaves students contained in EFL classes. In addition, some participants welcomed the simultaneous use of both languages, L1 and L2, in textbooks and teaching aids, citing Anime as a model in this regard. The study also presented recommendations for EFL teachers and policymakers to raise awareness of translanguaging as a learning tool in EFL classes.

**Keywords: Translanguaging, EFL, Saudi Arabia, L1 Arabic, Teachers' perceptions, Teachers' practices**

#### المخلص

يعدّ موضوع استخدام اللغة الأم في سياق تعليم اللغة الأجنبية موضوعاً جديلاً، إذ يمكن عدّ التناوب اللغوي أداة تعليمية من الممكن الاستفادة منها في التعلّم إذا أخذنا الأبحاث التي تؤيد استخدام اللغة الأولى على محمل الجدّ. لذا هدفت هذه الدراسة النوعية إلى استكشاف جزء بسيط من التفاعل اللغوي بين معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية وطلابهم. وقد اتبعت الدراسة هذه المنهجية لمعرفة تصورات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية وممارساتهم في استخدام اللغة الأولى كأداة لتعلّم في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية. واستخدمت المقابلات أداة لجمع البيانات، إذ تمت مقابلة أحد عشر معلماً - معلقين وتسع معلمات - من معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الحكومية من مختلف مناطق المملكة عبر الزوم لمناقشة تصوراتهم وممارساتهم في استخدام اللغة الأم في التعليم. وكشفت الدراسة بعد التحليل خمس أفكار رئيسية منها: أن معلمي اللغة لا يستخدمون العربية في التدريس إلا كإجراء أخير مع إجماعهم على أنهم يستخدمونها لتدريس بعض المحتوى العلمي وبعض مكونات اللغة كالمفردات والقواعد النحوية مع وجود قرار يلزم المعلمين عدم استخدام العربية في التدريس. الأمر الذي قد يدفع بالمعلمين إلى التشكيك في التناوب اللغوي وفوائده في التدريس. وكشفت الدراسة بالمقابل أن استخدام الطلاب للغة الأولى في الصف يُقابل بالرفض من قبل معلمهم الذين يرون أن استخدامها قد يُسهم في جعل الطلاب يشعرون بالاحتواء خلال الدروس. كما ظهر من خلال الدراسة أن بعض المشاركين قد رحّبوا بفكرة الاستخدام المترام للغة في الكتب المدرسية والوسائل التعليمية مستشهدين بالأنمي أنموذجاً في التعليم. وفي ضوء نتائج البحث قدّمت بعض التوصيات لمعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية ولصناع القرار منها: ضرورة تقديم برامج التطوير المعني لرفع مستوى الوعي حول ماهية التناوب اللغوي واستخدامه وتطبيقه أداة تعليمية في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية: التناوب اللغوي، اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية، المملكة العربية السعودية، اللغة الأولى: العربية، تصورات المعلمين، ممارسات المعلمين**



## 1. Introduction

The use of the first language in foreign language teaching contexts has long been a subject of debate. This is attributed to the widely held belief that exposing students to English second language (L2) for longer periods will accelerate their language learning. Auerbach (1993) argued that increased exposure to L2 not only facilitates quick learning but also fosters internalisation and thinking in L2. Moreover, teaching students more English in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes improves their outcomes (Phillipson, 1992). Nevertheless, educators have begun embracing innovative methods in EFL instruction. The term 'translinguifying', coined in the 1980s to describe the interchangeable use of English and Welsh as first language (L1) and L2, respectively, in classrooms, has gained prominence (Lewis et al., 2012). Later, this term was changed to translanguaging (Lewis et al., 2012). Since then, the use of L1 in EFL classes has garnered increasing attention from researchers in various contexts (Al-Ahdal, 2020; Alqahtani, 2022; Lewis et al., 2012; Yuvayapan, 2019; Wright et al., 2015; Grosjean, 2010; Baker, 2011; Garcia & Wei, 2015; Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020; Hussain & Khan, 2021; Siregar, 2020; García & Wei, 2014; Garcia, 2009; Berlianti & Pradita, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022). A substantial body of research has demonstrated the benefits of acknowledging students' first language and integrating it into EFL classes (Baker, 2011; Yuvayapan, 2019; Garcia & Wei, 2015; Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020; Hussain & Khan, 2021). This should help EFL teachers develop a positive outlook towards translanguaging and employ it in EFL classrooms. Nonetheless, studies have indicated that teachers have shown either ambivalence or positivity towards translanguaging. Such divergent viewpoints warrant further investigation to understand the underlying reasons for these mixed feelings. In Saudi Arabia, English is taught and used as a foreign language. Across all educational levels, it is taught from elementary to higher education. However, many studies have indicated that Saudi students showed low levels of proficiency in EFL classes and perform poorly in their English courses (Al-Nasser, 2015; Alrabai, 2016; Alqahtani, 2019; Alshammari, 2021). In such a context where teachers and learners typically share one language, with the former positioned to facilitate the latter in grasping content meaning (Al-Ahdal, 2020), employing translanguaging as a supportive learning tool can prove beneficial. However, translanguaging has not garnered significant attention in EFL classrooms in Saudi Arabia. When it is incorporated, it is often for

practical rather than pedagogical reasons (Alqahtani, 2022). Therefore, the current study aims to explore the perceptions and practices of Saudi English language teachers regarding translanguaging in the classroom, along with their justifications for both proponents and opponents.

## 2. Literature Review

The use of translanguaging in the context of foreign or second language teaching is inevitable, as both teachers and students are exposed to two languages in the classroom. The first language is typically that of the students and often the teachers as well, while the other language is the one being studied. The concept of translanguaging traces back to Welsh bilingual education in the 1980s (Lewis et al., 2012), where both Welsh and English were used interchangeably for learning and teaching. Initially termed 'translinguifying', it was later popularised as 'translanguaging' by Baker (2011). Translanguaging has garnered increased attention as an emerging teaching method in bilingual education contexts (Yuvayapan, 2019), where two languages or dialects are used in daily life (Wright et al., 2015; Grosjean, 2010). The term translanguaging as a method of learning and teaching has been explained and defined by numerous scholars. Beres (2015), for example, regards translanguaging as a learning method that permits students to express their learning output in a language different from that of instruction. This implies that students, while having their classes or lectures in English, may use their mother tongues to take notes during the lecture, explain topics in any preferred language, or attempt tests. This linguistic shift or transition from one language to another occurs unconsciously, thus linking translanguaging to the cognitive processes in students' minds (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021). Code-switching and translanguaging are two concepts that can be easily confused. It is essential to clarify that code-switching occurs in a conversation when one speaker uses one language and the other responds in a different language. While both terms involve a shift in language use, code-switching is typically used when observing students' output (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021). Translanguaging, however, describes the cognitive processes students engage in when making meaning using all the languages available to them (Oliver et al., 2021). Thus, a person may begin speaking in one language and then switch to another in the middle of their speech, or they may even shift languages within a single sentence (Richards &

Schmidt, 2010). In such cases, both terms can be used to describe what occurred. Although several foundational theories can underpin translanguaging in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory provides clear explanation for translanguaging. Sociocultural Theory highlights the importance of social interaction and cultural tools in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Translanguaging facilitates such interaction through assisting students to scaffold understanding. Indeed, Students' reliance on L1 to facilitate comprehension falls within Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development ZPD. Regarding the significance of translanguaging in the field of foreign language teaching, Baker (2011) outlined four benefits for students. Translanguaging may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of content, assist students in developing skills in their weaker language, facilitate home-school cooperation, and enable the concurrent development of learners' second language abilities alongside content learning. Similarly, Yuvayapan (2019) noted that the underlying philosophy of using translanguaging as a teaching method in bilingual education is that students can use the two languages to complement each other, leading to a better understanding of the content. Furthermore, as students attempt to make sense of their bilingual world, they construct their bilingual identity (Yuvayapan, 2019). Garcia and Wei (2015) assert that integrating translanguaging into language classrooms enhances students' competence in L2. They advocate for translanguaging as an approach that 'not only creates the possibility that bilingual students could use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire to make meaning, but also that teachers would "take it up" as a legitimate pedagogical practice' (Garcia & Wei, 2015, pp. 226–227). Additionally, Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020) highlight various benefits of translanguaging for teachers. It aids teachers in describing content, explaining vocabulary, providing directions, organising the classroom, offering feedback or comments, praising students, and fostering a positive relationship with them. Moreover, it facilitates clarification during activities and supports students with lower proficiency levels. Overall, translanguaging assists both students and teachers in achieving lesson objectives with enhanced understanding and engagement from the students (Hussain & Khan, 2021). The use of translanguaging in teaching a foreign language has garnered increasing acceptance among researchers in the field of foreign language teaching. Several studies have endeavoured to explain various strategies

for using translanguaging as a learning tool. Moreover, researchers have also examined the perceptions of English teachers or learners regarding the use of translanguaging in EFL classrooms within different contexts. The studies discussed below have demonstrated the application of translanguaging in EFL classes. Given the potential benefits that translanguaging offers, García and Wei (2014) proposed several strategies for effectively implementing translanguaging in the EFL classroom. These strategies include using multilingual texts, word walls, thematic units with multilingual vocabulary enquiry, sentence starters, collaborative dialogue, and grouping. Additionally, Garcia (2009) suggested another strategy that involves allowing students to use a specific concept or word from their L1 if it does not exist in the target language, or they may fill gaps in their target language knowledge with words from their L1. In an empirical study, Berlianti and Pradita (2021) explored the implementation of translanguaging in the classroom, particularly in higher education settings in Indonesia. Data were collected by recording two credits of full face-to-face classroom interactions, involving one lecturer and 45 students. The results indicated that incorporating translanguaging in EFL lectures was beneficial, as it enabled tutors to create engaging dialogues for students, facilitating their comprehension of challenging learning materials. These findings suggested that EFL lecturers prioritise ensuring students' understanding of complex subjects to enhance their English proficiency, thereby demonstrating the effectiveness of translanguaging in the learning and teaching process. In a similar vein, Hussain and Khan (2021) conducted a mixed-method study to explore the use of translanguaging as a sophisticated method of teaching and learning at the tertiary level in Pakistan. They found that using all available languages in teaching and learning made lessons more fruitful and facilitated a holistic understanding of the discussed phenomena. The study revealed that in several universities in Pakistan, teachers and students frequently use more than two languages, including Urdu, English and their mother tongue, during lectures and classroom discussions. However, the use of a third language, typically the regional language or students' mother tongue, alongside the officially accepted media of instruction, is relatively rare in universities (Hussain & Khan, 2021). These findings align with those of Siregar (2020), who examined the implementation of translanguaging in teaching English in vocational schools in Medan by

vocational English teachers. Through descriptive qualitative analysis of English instructors' discourse in vocational schools, the study found that teachers used translanguaging to help students understand the content in the classroom. This approach was seen to enhance students' competency in English comprehension and maintain their interest in studying English, thereby preventing boredom (Siregar, 2020). While studies such as those conducted by Berlianti and Pradita (2021), Hussain and Khan (2021) and Siregar (2020) focused on the use of translanguaging by non-native English teachers, Jiang et al. (2022) examined the participation of native English teachers in translanguaging within Hong Kong TESOL classrooms. They employed in-depth semi-structured individual interviews and video recordings of classroom interactions to collect data. The findings revealed that teachers frequently used multimodal translanguaging strategies, incorporating non-linguistic resources such as gestures, pictures, and realia. These findings suggest that translanguaging can serve as a valuable method for enhancing communication and participation in multilingual classrooms. Altogether, various research studies have highlighted that translanguaging can serve as a beneficial pedagogy in EFL classes, ultimately enhancing students' learning experiences. However, it is worth noting that some teachers may not fully embrace this innovative pedagogical tool, which promotes the use of languages other than English in EFL classes. Therefore, it is crucial to seek to understand EFL teachers' perceptions of translanguaging and the factors that contribute to shaping these perceptions. Stakeholders' attitudes toward translanguaging were investigated in a study conducted by Fang & Liu (2020), which examined the opinions of teachers, students, and administrators at a Chinese institution. Survey results revealed that stakeholders generally support translanguaging practices but express concerns about potential negative impacts on students' English proficiency. The study emphasises the need for a comprehensive understanding of translanguaging and its potential benefits and drawbacks in English language teaching (ELT) environments. A similar sceptical view of translanguaging was found in Yuvayapan's study (2019), which examined English language teachers' perceptions and practices of translanguaging in EFL classrooms. The study involved 50 EFL teachers from various schools and cities in Turkey who completed a questionnaire, along with semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 of these teachers to determine the

reasons for the differences between their perceptions and actual use of L1. Additionally, classroom observations were carried out with five EFL teachers from three different private schools in Turkey to investigate the purposes for which they used L1 in their teaching. The study found that although EFL teachers held positive perceptions of translanguaging, their practices sometimes contradicted these perceptions. Teachers reported infrequent use of translanguaging due to expectations from colleagues, institutions and parents of their students. In support of the same sceptical perception of translanguaging, Al-Ta'ani's study (2019) concluded that while the use of students' mother tongue language and its impact on understanding L2 is significant, teachers should be very selective about when to use Arabic in an English classroom. The study suggests that the use of the first language in an English classroom to save time and effort for both teachers and students is not an effective technique for Emirati students (Al-Ta'ani, 2019). Nonetheless, the study indicated that using L1 in EFL classrooms could be a powerful and effective method in the learning process. The researcher recruited 150 students and 50 teachers to participate in the study, and classroom observations were used to evaluate the quality of L1 (Arabic in this case) in L2 classrooms. Similarly, standpoints of teachers and their students of using Arabic in EFL classrooms in Saudi public schools were depicted in a study conducted by Al-Nofaie (2010). Teachers and students both have a positive attitude towards using (L1) in classrooms. However, the study concluded that using Arabic should be moderated under certain situations. Al-Ahdal (2020a), in a more recent study found that English language teachers in Saudi Arabia had a positive attitude towards translanguaging and allowed learners to use Arabic for practical reasons such as making them more engaged in the class and increasing their motivation to learn. Yet, he added that learners were uncomfortable with this practice because they believed that using translanguaging could slow their acquisition of the English language. To sum up, even when teachers found translanguaging a useful tool, research doubt its benefits and go further to suggest limiting its use to certain situations. Similarly, Alharbi and Alqefari (2023) examined teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging in Saudi Arabia and explored the ideological underpinnings of those attitudes. The findings were consistent with other studies and revealed that teachers were ambivalent about its use due to ideological, institutional, and pedagogical

reasons. The study concluded that translanguaging methods are viewed favourably by EFL teachers when both students and teachers share common cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Consonant with this finding, Wang's study (2019) unveiled that teachers in Chinese universities were ambivalent about translanguaging in classrooms. They perceived it as challenging to accommodate multilingualism effectively. The study concluded with suggestions for teachers to explore more creative pedagogical approaches in foreign language education. Nonetheless, despite the studies against the use of translanguaging in the classroom, there is a considerable body of literature that has produced contradictory results regarding its efficacy. In a study conducted by Liu and Fang (2022), students, parents and teachers expressed generally positive attitudes towards translanguaging approaches in diverse English language teaching situations. The study emphasises the importance of recognising and leveraging students' multilingual repertoires to enhance language learning and content acquisition. Similarly, positive attitudes were observed in a study conducted in Saudi Arabia to investigate teachers' attitudes (Al-Ahdal, 2020). Teachers allowed learners to use Arabic for practical reasons, such as increasing engagement in the class and enhancing motivation to learn. However, learners expressed discomfort with this practice, as they believed that translanguaging could impede their acquisition of the English language. To sum up, In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) across all educational levels. Nonetheless, research indicated that Saudi students showed low levels of proficiency in EFL classes and perform poorly in their English courses. In such a context, Translanguaging as a transformative learning tool can enhance students' comprehension and engagement (Al-Ahdal, 2020) and this ultimately can improve students' linguistic proficiency.

However, translanguaging remains underutilised. This is due to ideological, institutional, and pedagogical reasons (Alharbi & Alqefari, 2023). For instance, some institutional policies discourage integrating students' first language (L1) despite evidence suggesting its educational benefits. Some studies have highlighted the potential benefits of translanguaging as a pedagogy for promoting vocabulary development, grammatical accuracy, cultural understanding and effective classroom management, others have indicated that some teachers hold a negative standpoint towards it. Therefore, there is a need for careful implementation

and ongoing professional development for teachers to ensure that translanguaging is used effectively and appropriately in EFL classrooms. Professional development can start with raising teachers' and supervisors' awareness with such a transformative learning tool. They can also benefit from strategies-based training to implement translanguaging in EFL classes like word wall and the use of multilingual texts and many more strategies. Additionally, it is equally important to investigate teachers' perceptions, whether negative or positive, and understand the factors that influence their standpoint. This understanding can contribute to more informed decisions regarding the integration of translanguaging in language teaching practices in EFL classes in Saudi. This study aims to explore how teachers perceive translanguaging and what factors influence their stance of translanguaging in EFL classes.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Question**

Based on the theoretical framework discussed above, the study aimed to address the following research question: What are the perceptions and practices of Saudi EFL teachers regarding translanguaging as a language learning tool in state schools?

#### **3.2. Methods**

The current study is situated within the interpretive paradigm, which involves a process of understanding social or human problems (Creswell, 1994). According to Crotty (1998), 'an interpretive paradigm is an approach that can understand and explain human and social reality' (p. 67). This enquiry recognises that meaning is socially constructed in the minds of participants because social reality holds no significance until human minds can make sense of it (Crotty, 1998). The study aims to explore and understand the participants' perceptions and practices of translanguaging in the English classroom as a language learning tool. Therefore, reality will be viewed as varied, subjective, and constructed in their minds rather than being objectively 'out there'. Accordingly, an exploratory research methodology was adopted. This methodology is typically employed to study a phenomenon or condition (Dörnyei, 2007). It enables the researcher to understand why things happen from the insiders' viewpoint. In the current study, English language teachers' perceptions and practices of translanguaging as a language learning tool were explored using this approach. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used to explore Saudi

EFL teachers' perceptions and practices regarding translanguaging as a learning tool in state schools.

**3.3. Participants and Sampling**

The participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, which is known for its ability to provide in-depth information (Cohen et al., 2007). This strategy allows researchers to select participants based on their judgment (Bryman, 2012). In this study, participants were chosen for their expertise and relevance to the research objectives, specifically their experience in EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia. We approached several experienced EFL teachers in different state schools in Saudi Arabia, and 11 of them agreed to participate, resulting in an 84% response rate. The participants, all identified by pseudonyms, included teachers and English language supervisors. Four of the participants taught at the elementary level, and three of them taught other levels, while the remaining four were English language supervisors who had also taught English at some point in their careers. All participants held bachelor's degrees in English language teaching, and three teachers were enrolled in the Khebraat programme, a one-year training programme in the U.S. offered by the Ministry of Education for Saudi English language teachers. For a detailed description of the study participants, please refer to Table 1.

perceptions and practices of translanguaging in EFL classes as a language learning tool. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow participants to express their perceptions and practices regarding translanguaging in the Saudi EFL classroom. Dornyei (2007) described the skeleton structure of a semi-structured interview as a conversation between the interviewer and all the participants in which he asks the same questions. However, he added that there are usually some variations, and some probes are used (Dornyei, 2007). Furthermore, using semi structured interviews allow the researcher to determine which questions he wanted to ask during the interview and form any additional questions that would be useful for further explanation (Robson, 2002). Participants were approached and informed about the research aims and the voluntary nature of participation. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured that participation was entirely voluntary, with the option to withdraw from the study at any stage. Interview questions were available in both Arabic and English. Interviews were conducted via Zoom with all participants, except for two teachers who chose to respond to the interview schedule in writing in English. However, all other participants preferred to conduct the interviews in Arabic. The duration of the interviews ranged from 17 minutes to 55 minutes, with most lasting about half an hour. Interviews were initially recorded and securely stored in OneDrive by one of the researchers. The semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 1) comprised two main parts: the first part asked

**Table 1**  
*Participants' demographics*

No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Job Title	Qualifications	Teaching Experience	Received Khebraat Programme Training
1.	Lama	Female	EFL Teachers	B.A. in ELT	18 years	-
2.	Tamara	Female		B.A. in ELT	10 years	Yes
3.	Ali	Male		B.A. in ELT	21 years	-
4.	Sara	Female		B.A. in ELT	16 years	Yes
5.	Reem	Female		B.A. in ELT	11 years	-
6.	Layla	Female		B.A. in ELT	21 years	Yes
7.	Sally	Female		B.A. in ELT	14 years	-
8.	Salwa	Female		B.A. in ELT	21 years	-
9.	Sami	Male		B.A. in ELT		
• MEd in Educational Leadership	20 years	-	EFL Supervisors			
10.	Nada	Female		B.A. in ELT	9 years	-
11.	Rana	Female		B.A. in ELT	17 years	-

**3.4. Data Collection**

Data were collected by two researchers in this qualitative study, which aimed to explore EFL teachers'

about demographic details, namely the level at which the teacher teaches English and the length of their experience. Questions in the second part fell under

two domains: 1) teachers' perceptions about the use of L1 (Arabic) in English classes, and 2) their practices of it. For the teachers' perceptions, we enquired if using L1 would facilitate communication, help students make sense of content or make the class more interesting. We also asked teachers if they believed that using Arabic and English in textbooks or on the boards would improve students' English proficiency. Regarding practices, teachers were asked if they used or allowed their students to use Arabic in class and what they did if their students could not understand the lesson. We were also interested to know how students communicated when lacking proficiency and how teachers would react if their students used Arabic in class.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were meticulously prepared to facilitate thorough examination. To ensure clarity and traceability, each interview was assigned a unique identification. Transcripts were stored in a secure and easily accessible location for convenient retrieval. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, a technique described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as 'a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (p. 70). The data collected from semi-structured interviews in the current study was analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques outlined by Creswell (2007). This process involved organising the data, coding it to condense into themes and finally portraying it. The study question guided the researchers' attention to facts that answered the enquiry, ensuring that no critical or pertinent information was overlooked. Themes were thoroughly examined to understand their interrelationships and implications. Subthemes within broader themes were identified to provide a more nuanced view of the data. Relevant instances from the data were used to illustrate the significance of the themes. As a result, the data was better structured and more accessible, ultimately providing findings and answers to the study question. Two strategies were used to ensure trustworthiness: 1) member checking, in which some participants were given an opportunity to review their data and confirm our interpretations, and 2) peer debriefing, where researchers discussed the themes to validate their interpretations.

## 4. Results

This section reports the five overarching themes gleaned from the interviews. Teachers' stances about translanguaging were varied and indecisive.

Some were in favour of using L1 Arabic in English classes, while others would only resort to Arabic as a last resort. Regarding teachers' practices, they unanimously reported using Arabic to teach specific content and certain language components, namely grammar and vocabulary. However, these practices of using L1 contradicted their stances, which can be attributed to policies that fostered teachers' scepticism and resistance to acknowledging the benefits of translanguaging. Findings revealed that students' use of L1 in English language classrooms elicited a dismissive reaction from teachers, despite believing that translanguaging helps students feel more comfortable in EFL classes. Additionally, some study participants welcomed the use of both languages, L1 and L2, side by side in textbooks and teaching aids, citing Anime as a model in this regard.

### 4.1. Perceptions about using L1 Arabic in the EFL classroom

#### 4.1.1. Opponents of Using L1 Arabic in L2 English Classes

The participants revealed varying stances regarding their perceptions of translanguaging, with some holding a negative view of it. They were firmly against the use of the Arabic language in English classes. For instance, Sami, a supervisor, exemplified this stance by stating, 'I would use Arabic only as a last resort'. Layla also expressed her reluctance, saying: I avoid using Arabic. I only use it when I feel students are not able to understand. Overusing Arabic in English classes negatively impacts students' learning. Using Arabic in English classes is not teaching. It's more like translating! Nada agreed with Layla, noting that the use of Arabic in class negatively affects students' learning, as 'students would not make any effort to learn if they were given a translation of their material'. Sally shared her perspective, stating that, based on her experience, the use of Arabic did not contribute positively to English classes, as it 'would not push students to learn'. Rana, a supervisor, shared a similar opinion to Layla's regarding translanguaging. They both believed that translanguaging equated to translation, so they saw no point in using it. However, Rana was more specific about the negative effects of using L1 in English classes. She listed a few of them below: I believe the use of L1 Arabic (1) weakens students' listening skills in English, and this eventually affects overall comprehension skills; (2) the use of Arabic would urge students to focus on Arabic instead of English; (3) teaching aids that have already been produced in English would lose their value; and (4) the translation

approach that has been applied in schools is behind the limited size of English vocabulary among students in Saudi. To sum up, some teachers and supervisors believe that translanguaging is merely translation and not helpful. For one of them, students' low proficiency in English is attributable to the translation approach in teaching.

#### **4.1.2. Proponents of Using L1 Arabic in L2 English Classes**

On the other end of the continuum, some advocate for translanguaging. Lama, an elementary school teacher, was in favour of using L1 Arabic in English classes. She said, 'I value the use of Arabic in English classes. I think the curriculum is far beyond the students' understanding'. Tamara also advocated for the use of Arabic in English classes, stating that the use of L1 is 'inevitable'. She supported her opinion with the practices of L2 teachers in the Khebrat programme in the U.S. She said, An English language supervisor criticised me for using Arabic in my class. I cannot entirely agree with her approach. When I participated in the Khebrat programme in the U.S., I found that teachers there used English to explain French and Spanish. American teachers use English, and they are okay with this. In contrast, here, supervisors insist on using 'English only' in teaching English classes. Between these two groups – opponents and proponents of the use of L1 in English classes – some were selective about when to use L1 in English classes. Ali described using L1 in English classes as necessary in some situations. He indicated that, The use of L1 Arabic depends on the target skill. I use less Arabic in listening and speaking activities than in reading and writing classes. However, the focus in our textbooks is on building technical vocabulary, which, given the students' level, necessitates using Arabic in certain situations. Similarly, Salwa, a supervisor, believed that using Arabic could be helpful. She also supported her view with the practices of L2 teachers in the U.S., stating, I have seen English being used in teaching the Spanish language in the U.S.; therefore, I think the use of Arabic to teach and explain English is very helpful. However, I am in favour of the mindful use of Arabic, meaning I encourage using it only if needed.

#### **4.2. Teachers' reported practices of translanguaging**

Although participants in this study held various stances on translanguaging, they unanimously reported using it to teach some content and language components, namely grammar and vocabulary. Sara believed that the use of Arabic in English classes is a phase of learning, and learning English would not

be possible without comparing it to the language that the students speak. She thought that, The use of the mother tongue can help students understand the content. I use it to explain grammar, to highlight the differences between the two languages in grammatical structures, such as where to put adjectives and nouns in English sentences compared to Arabic ones. Five EFL teachers believed that Arabic is necessary in their English grammar classes. This view is exemplified by Sami and Nada, who reported that they use Arabic to teach grammar. Additionally, Sally explained, 'Arabic is used to explain grammar rules because I do not want them to misunderstand me'. Tamara also used Arabic to explain English grammar to sixth graders. Using Arabic is inevitable to help them understand the rule, and then we switch to using English to apply it; for example, I used it to explain how to use comparatives in English. This is not the only content with which I use English. I also use Arabic to translate the meaning of unknown vocabulary, especially if they cannot guess it right by themselves. It is okay to use it to clarify things and to save time, but not the whole lesson is delivered in Arabic. Similarly, Lama highlighted that 'there is a major need for using Arabic to teach grammar. I use mind maps in English, and I ask them to write the explanation in Arabic'. Thus, Arabic can also be used to teach vocabulary. This was reflected in Reem's response: I use the Arabic language in my classes. Particularly when I introduce an activity or send a link to them because I want to ensure they understand the activity. I also use it to introduce new vocabulary and explain new rules. A closer look at these reported practices of teachers and supervisors revealed contradictions with their stated perceptions. In other words, even those who were totally against the use of L1 in English classes used Arabic when they were asked about teaching certain language components or specific difficult content.

#### **4.3. Policies and translanguaging in the Saudi EFL classroom**

Some teachers were sceptical about using translanguaging. They felt guilty when they used it. Layla voiced this scepticism, saying, 'I feel like I'm doing something wrong when I use it. Supervisors guide us not to use it in a classroom in secondary schools. Sally indicated that she limited the use of L1 to times when students 'are unable to understand what I want them to, so I say it timidly in Arabic once'. Layla and Sally's descriptions suggested that this was not a preferred practice. Other teachers explained that they did so because they were following instructions

given to them by supervisors. For instance, Layla and Lama were guided by supervisors not to use Arabic in English classes. Reem also indicated that her practice, Aligns with the Ministry of Education instructions. We are allowed to use Arabic when needed with primary school children. However, we are not allowed to use it with them for high school classes. In this regard, supervisors confirmed this when they were asked about the Ministry guidelines on using L1 in English classes. Nada highlighted that they had specific criteria for assessing teachers' performance that can be negatively affected when teachers opt to use L1 Arabic in classes. Rana was more specific when she determined the proportion of the class time to use L1 Arabic: I would allow teachers I supervise to use only 1% of the class time in Arabic and only if needed. Officially, teachers are not allowed to use Arabic and are assessed based on this. This was also verified by Sami, another supervisor, who indicated that teachers were not supposed to use L1 Arabic, as guided by the Saudi Ministry of Education instructions, the English Language Teaching Department.

#### **4.4. Teachers' reactions to students' use of Arabic in the English language classroom**

Teachers' scepticism towards the use of translanguaging was reflected in their reactions when students used Arabic in the classroom. They used these opportunities to motivate students to learn and improve their English. Ali mentioned this in the following excerpt: 'I try to use such opportunities to help students rephrase them into English'.

Similarly, Layla, aiming to create a relaxed atmosphere for students, indicated that she would accept their answers in Arabic if they could not express them in English. She emphasised that this should serve as motivation for students to strive harder to learn how to express themselves in English by the end of the lesson. In this regard, Ali and Layla represent those who welcome and encourage the use of L1. However, some are more dismissive of this practice. Tamara, for example, exemplifies that stance. She said: When students answer questions using Arabic, I feel uneasy. For example, in one of my fifth-grade classes, I asked a question with the answer 'car'. One of the students responded in Arabic (sayyarah). Since we had studied that word, I instructed her to say it in English, even if she wasn't sure of the pronunciation. I keep reminding them, 'No, don't say it in Arabic'. This reaction was substantiated by Sally, who justified that for assessment purposes, 'I do not allow students to use Arabic to communicate with me. They must use English. They

are never allowed to say it in Arabic, since they would be assessed in English'.

#### **4.5. Translanguaging leaves students feeling contained**

When participants in this study were asked about their reaction when students used Arabic in English classes, an important finding emerged. A group of them indicated that they would allow students to communicate in Arabic if they attempted to do so. Reem, for example, stated,

I must be careful, because not allowing students to use Arabic in the classroom would shut down their positive interaction. They would refrain from trying to communicate in the classroom. Sami also expressed similar doubts about prohibiting students from communicating in L1. I would not encourage students to use Arabic to communicate with each other; however, if one of the students chooses to use Arabic to express themselves, I should not stop them. Given that some teachers were primarily against using Arabic, this stance of not stopping students from using it contradicts the views they expressed earlier. However, one possible justification is that they strongly believe that the use of L1 would have a positive psychological effect on students. This can be gleaned from Nada's words when she said: 'Using Arabic in class would make students feel more relaxed and secure. This will make English seem more approachable and will eventually lead to better learning'.

Such a psychological effect was described by Sara, who said: Some students feel lost when we do not use Arabic; when we use it, they feel contained... the use of Arabic boosts students' confidence. Once they know that they can say what they want to say, even in Arabic, it makes them feel secure and eventually minimises anxiety levels in English classes.

#### **4.6. The use of both languages in textbooks and teaching aids: Anime as a model**

Like the participants' views on translanguaging in general, as indicated earlier, they showed the same disparity of standpoints when asked about their views on using both languages in textbooks and teaching aids. Nada supported the integration of Arabic and English on the same page of the textbook and in teaching aids. Such an approach, she believed, 'facilitates understanding and strengthens students' English proficiency'. Nada also believed that the international trend of teaching the Japanese language using Arabic in Anime sets a good example that could be followed exactly to teach English. Lama also thought that 'there is a big need for writing in

Arabic to help students remember when they prepare for exams'. Nonetheless, some disagreed with such an approach, believing that integration could adversely affect students' learning. Sami considered this approach 'unfavourable and unlikely to improve students' bilingual competency', especially among students at advanced levels. He believed this could encourage students to rely more on Arabic instead of learning English. Similarly, students may become overly dependent on Arabic if it is used in books, as indicated by Tamara. She said: 'I use this approach when I read certain stories as an extracurricular activity: one page in English and another in Arabic'. Additionally, Rana pinpointed what she thought was a drawback of integration. She described such practice as a time-consuming activity that requires students to process information in one language and give answers in another. She explained her view as follows: We can only use this with fourth graders, since they are beginners, but this should not be extended to the fifth graders, as this can make them slow. They will translate what they study in English into Arabic, process it, then answer in English. I always advise students not to think in Arabic. This is time-consuming.

## 5. Discussion

A careful examination of the findings of this study reveals teachers' inconsistent attitudes towards the translanguaging approach to teaching. Even those who held a negative stance unanimously advocated the use of L1 Arabic when teaching certain language components or specific difficult content. This contradiction aligns with the findings of Al Bataineh and Gallagher's (2021) study, in which Emirati pre-service teachers also exhibited contradictory attitudes towards translanguaging. This finding is also consistent with Yuvayapan's (2019) research, which showed that teachers' practices in Turkey did not reflect their positive perceptions of translanguaging. The gap between teachers' perceptions and practices could be explained by several factors. First, it may stem from teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of translanguaging and its potential benefits. Many teachers mistakenly interpret translanguaging as mere translation, attributing students' low proficiency to this misconception. The prevailing notion among teachers is that translanguaging is limited to translation. However, according to Oliver et al. (2021), translanguaging is a broader construct that encompasses communication and meaning making. Additionally, the concept of using one's 'own language', as described by Hall

and Cook (2012), can act as a scaffold for students' learning. This approach enables learners to connect with the world around them using their cognitive and linguistic resources in their first language (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021). When teachers equate translanguaging solely with translation, they overlook the potential benefits of using students' first language in learning another language. Second, the inconsistency in teachers' perceptions and practices regarding translanguaging could be attributed to policies influenced by monoglossic ideology (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021). For a long time, the use of L1 in EFL classes has been viewed as taboo, as described by Anindya et al. (2022). This perspective stems from the strong belief that prolonged exposure to L2 is beneficial for learners (Auerbach, 1993). Not only do teachers and supervisors tend to harbour inconsistent views about the use of L1 in English classes, but decision-makers also hold the conviction that L1 should be avoided. Decisions made by opponents of L1 usage have a profound influence on teachers' classroom practices. Despite teachers' willingness to incorporate L1, they are often bound by instructions that they must adhere to in order to receive favourable evaluations of their teaching. Third, the deeply rooted belief in maintaining English-only environments in EFL classes may have influenced teachers' preferences. It is possible that these teachers were themselves educated in monolingual environments, leading them to adopt similar teaching methods and overlook new approaches to teaching EFL. As a result, they may remain loyal to traditional teaching methods rather than exploring innovative approaches. The potential benefits of translanguaging, which begin with acknowledging students' own language and identity, as well as leveraging their linguistic repertoire in learning, highlight the importance of promoting the use of translanguaging in EFL classes. This can be achieved through the introduction of continuous professional development programmes for both teachers and supervisors, aimed at keeping them updated with innovative pedagogical approaches in the EFL arena. For instance, a training program to raise supervisors' and policy makers' awareness about such a transformative learning tool can result in setting translanguaging-advocate policies in educational system. Also, teachers can benefit from a training program to familiarise them with translanguaging and its educational benefits. Professional development programmes can address other key areas such as practical application of translanguaging in EFL

classrooms like how to conduct note-taking activity in L1 and writing drafts of written assignments in L1 etc. Another important finding from this study is that translanguaging has a positive psychological impact on students. This teaching approach makes students feel included and secure. Embracing a translanguaging approach in teaching maximises inclusivity chances in the classroom (Oliver et al., 2021). Omidire and Ayob's findings (2020) supported the notion that using L1 in the EFL classroom makes learners feel included, leading to better engagement. Furthermore, using L1 is believed to enhance students' confidence. Similarly, Anindya et al. (2022) found that students feel confident using L1 in EFL classes, especially as they vary in proficiency levels and find this practice helpful. One possible explanation for this confidence boost is that the foreign language content is mediated using a language they know, in this case, Arabic. Additionally, by using Arabic, they facilitate learning by transitioning from the known (Arabic) to the unknown (English). This makes the content comprehensible, and when students perceive the content as understandable, they may find themselves capable of performing comfortably in English classes. On the other hand, it is important to reflect on the teachers' reactions when students use L1 Arabic in the classroom. The findings have shown that some teachers were strictly against the use of Arabic by students in the classroom. They would make it very clear to their students that using L1 is not allowed. Thereby, students may refrain from being fully engaged with teachers in EFL classes.

## 6. Conclusion

Although the findings generally supported inconsistent perceptions of translanguaging as a useful pedagogical tool in EFL classes, most teachers reported that they used it, whether to teach specific content or new vocabulary. A monolingual-oriented atmosphere of teaching English can be partially attributed to policies. Reflecting on how these teachers were taught English, most likely using a zero-L1 style of EFL teaching, might also explain their inconsistent standpoints. The contradiction between teachers' reported practices and their perceptions raises questions about translanguaging, not only concerning justifications but also regarding actual practices using L1 in EFL classes. We recommend keeping both supervisors and teachers updated with pedagogical developments in the EFL arena. Professional development programmes may include a training program to raise awareness about such a transformative learning tool. A more

specific program on what is translanguaging, and what are its advantages, and how it is implemented in EFL classrooms can also be helpful to teachers. This research was limited to explore teachers' reported practices and perceptions of translanguaging, therefore further research is recommended to investigate teachers' practices of translanguaging in classrooms through observation and how it affects students' learning of EFL. In addition, it would be interesting to explore how teachers' acceptance or rejection of translanguaging affects students' feelings and performance in EFL classes. However, this was beyond the scope of the current study, as the sample was confined to teachers. Therefore, listening to the stories of students is highly recommended in future research endeavours.

## Appendix 1 Interview Questions

### Demographic details:

Q1: Which grades are you teaching?

Q2: How long have you been teaching English?

Q3: How would you classify the English language proficiency of your students? Are they competent users? Are they beginners?

### Teachers' use of Arabic in the English language classroom:

Q4: Do your students use Arabic in class? If yes, do you use standard Arabic or dialect?

Q5: Some teachers exclude L1 and do not value it, while others use it sometimes but do not value it, and some use it and value it. How would you describe your approach?

Q6: Do you think that the use of Arabic would help students communicate better or leave them at a loss if not used?

Q7: Do you think the use of Arabic would help students make sense of content?

Q8: Do you think the use of Arabic in English classes would make them more interesting?

Q9: What would you do if students are unable to understand what you are saying?

Q10: If you do not use Arabic in your classes for teaching or assessing, what stops you? What makes you sceptical about it?

Q11: Are you usually guided by decision-makers (supervisors) not to use Arabic language at all in the classroom? Are you allowed to use Arabic in English language classes? Are there any pressures from administration or parents in this regard?

Q12: Do you think that Arabic and English can be

integrated on the same page of the book or on the board to encourage bilingual competency? Justify your answer by providing some advantages and disadvantages of such an approach.

Q13: How do you react to students who use their mother tongue in class?

Q14: Sometimes some students do not like the use of their first language, and they begin to stop other students from using it. Has this happened to you? How would you react?

### Students' use of Arabic in the English language classroom and their teachers' attitudes:

Q15: How do your students communicate when they lack the proficiency needed to communicate?

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The background is a deep blue with several large, curved, overlapping shapes in lighter and darker shades of blue, creating a sense of depth and movement. The shapes are smooth and organic, resembling waves or flowing liquid.

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