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Bridging Linguistic Gaps: A Quantitative Study on the Role of Arabic in Libyan University EFL Classrooms

Seham Sassi Abdulah
Sabratha University, Libya

Abstract

The integration of the first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction remains a subject of debate, particularly in contexts where English exposure outside the classroom is limited. This study examines how Libyan university EFL instructors incorporate Arabic (L1) into their teaching, focusing on its frequency, instructional contexts, and influencing factors. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey, data were collected from 45 university-level EFL instructors across multiple institutions. The findings reveal that 70% of instructors use Arabic, primarily for vocabulary explanations, classroom instructions, and comprehension support, while 30% follow an English-only approach. However, opinions on incorporating L1 vary, with concerns about potential over-reliance, particularly in grammar instruction and classroom discipline.The study also highlights teaching experience and student proficiency as key determinants of L1 use. More experienced instructors adopt a flexible, strategic approach, whereas less-experienced educators tend to follow monolingual methodologies, reflecting the influence of teacher training programmes. Similarly, L1 use is more common in advanced-level courses, where students engage with complex academic content, while lower-year instructors prioritise English immersion to develop foundational language skills. Additionally, attitudes towards native-like proficiency are shifting, with most instructors emphasising communicative competence over rigid adherence to native-speaker norms.These findings have significant implications for teacher training and institutional policies. The study advocates for evidence-based bilingual pedagogy, recommending that universities move beyond rigid English-only policies and adopt context-sensitive L1 guidelines that align with students' needs and proficiency levels. Teacher training programmes should also equip instructors with bilingual strategies that balance Arabic support with progressive L2 immersion.Future research should explore student perspectives on L1 integration, assess the long-term impact of bilingual

strategies, and investigate the role of digital tools in bilingual instruction. By adopting a balanced, research-informed approach, Libyan universities can enhance English proficiency while utilising Arabic as a valuable learning resource, ensuring that students develop both linguistic competence and academic success.

Keywords: first language use, bilingual pedagogy, EFL instruction, teacher perceptions, language policy, communicative competence.

1. Introduction

The use of the first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has been widely debated in applied linguistics, education, and language policy.At the heart of this discussion is whether L1 should be minimised to promote full immersion in the target language (L2) or strategically incorporated as a tool to enhance comprehension and learning efficiency. Proponents of monolingual instruction argue that maximum exposure to English fosters fluency and communicative competence, while advocates of bilingual pedagogy emphasise the benefits of L1 in scaffolding learning, reducing anxiety, and accelerating language acquisition. This debate is particularly relevant in EFL contexts like Libya, where opportunities for English exposure outside the classroom are limited, making classroom instruction the primary source of language input.

In Libyan higher education, English is a core component of university curricula, serving as both a medium of instruction and a requirement for academic and professional advancement. University instructors are responsible for equipping English major students with linguistic proficiency and subject-specific knowledge in fields such as linguistics, literature, and translation. Since both students and instructors share Arabic as their native language, the extent to which L1 should be integrated into instruction remains contested. Some instructors adopt an English-only policy, believing it promotes fluency, while others strategically use Arabic to clarify complex concepts, support classroom management, and provide sociocultural context. The challenge lies in striking a balance that maximises English proficiency while ensuring that L1 is used as a supportive rather than a restrictive tool in the learning process.

Despite the significance of this issue, empirical research on L1 use in Libyan EFL classrooms remains limited, particularly in terms of quantitative analysis. While previous studies have examined instructors' perceptions of Arabic use, few have systematically

investigated its actual frequency, instructional contexts, and influencing factors. This gap is particularly important for English major students, who must engage with complex linguistic and literary materials that demand advanced proficiency. Without systematic data, the effectiveness of different bilingual teaching strategies in Libyan higher education remains largely unexplored.

This study seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive quantitative analysis of L1 use among Libyan university EFL instructors. Specifically, it examines how frequently Arabic is used, in what contexts it is integrated, and what factors influence instructors' decisions regarding L1 incorporation. By doing so, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on bilingual pedagogy and offers empirical insights that can inform instructional strategies, curriculum development, and language policy in Libyan higher education. The findings will be particularly valuable for curriculum designers, policymakers, and teacher training programmes seeking to optimise L1 use while maintaining a strong emphasis on English language acquisition.

Background and Context

The role of the first language (L1) in second language acquisition (SLA) has long been a subject of debate in applied linguistics, influencing teaching practices and language policies worldwide. Traditional SLA theories, such as Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, argue that exposure to comprehensible input in the target language (L2) is crucial for language development. Similarly, teaching methodologies like the Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) advocate for full English immersion, aiming to develop learners' communicative competence without relying on their native language. The core assumption behind these approaches is that L2 acquisition happens more naturally when learners are encouraged to think and interact exclusively in English.

However, alternative perspectives challenge the idea that L1 should be excluded from language learning. Cummins' (1979) Interdependence Hypothesis suggests that a strong foundation in L1 supports L2 development, particularly in academic settings where cognitive and linguistic skills transfer across languages. Likewise, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory highlights L1's role as a scaffolding tool, helping learners process complex concepts before transitioning to full L2 engagement. This is particularly relevant in EFL contexts like Libya,

where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, making L1 an important resource for understanding and engagement.

Research supports the strategic use of L1 in EFL instruction, particularly for explaining difficult grammar, introducing new vocabulary, and managing classroom interactions (Alsied, 2018; Mansor, 2017; Tiwari, 2024). Studies indicate that L1 reduces cognitive overload and learning anxiety, particularly among lower-proficiency learners (Cummins, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978). In Libyan higher education, instructors frequently turn to Arabic to clarify complex ideas, reinforce lesson content, and maintain student engagement (Al-Ta'ani, 2019).

Despite its benefits, concerns persist about overusing L1 in the classroom. Excessive reliance on Arabic could reduce students' exposure to English, slow down their development of communicative competence, and create linguistic dependence (Elmangoush, 2023; First Language Use in EFL Classes, 2022). While research suggests that controlled L1 use can enhance learning efficiency, prolonged reliance may hinder students' ability to transition into independent L2 use (Marsella, 2020; Swain &Lapkin, 2000). Additionally, the extent to which instructors use L1 often depends on experience and training, with research showing that more experienced educators are better at balancing bilingual support with English immersion (Mansor, 2017; Macaro et al., 2020).

The challenge for EFL instructors, therefore, is to find the right balance—using L1 as a supportive learning tool while ensuring students receive sufficient exposure to English. This study contributes to this discussion by examining how Libyan university EFL instructors navigate this balance, offering insights into effective and research-informed approaches to L1 integration in EFL instruction.

Research Problem and Rationale

The role of L1 in EFL instruction continues to spark debate, with studies in Libya highlighting both its widespread use and the inconsistencies in how it is applied across university classrooms (El Daibani, 2024; Mansor, 2017; Alsied, 2018). While research has explored instructors' attitudes towards L1 integration (Ahmed, 2020; Salem, 2019), there remains a lack of systematic quantitative analysis examining how frequently Arabic is used, in what contexts, and what factors shape its use. This gap is particularly significant for English major students, who are expected to attain advanced linguistic proficiency and engage with

complex academic content. Understanding the patterns and rationale behind L1 use in these settings is essential for developing effective bilingual teaching strategies that support learning without hindering L2 acquisition.

Existing research presents mixed findings on L1 use in Libyan EFL classrooms, influenced by factors such as student proficiency, instructor beliefs, and institutional policies. Some studies suggest that Arabic is commonly used to explain complex grammatical structures and aid comprehension (Mansor, 2017; Alsied, 2018), while others express concerns about overuse and its potential impact on L2 fluency (Elmangoush, 2023). From a student perspective, Abdul Rahman (2021) conducted a quantitative study investigating learners' perceptions of L1 use, offering insights into how they experience and respond to it in the classroom. In contrast, Abdulah (2025) provided a qualitative exploration of how instructors' attitudes towards L1 use have evolved over time, revealing shifts in pedagogical beliefs and institutional expectations. While these studies contribute valuable perspectives, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive, data-driven research examining how instructors actually use L1 in EFL classrooms. Without empirical evidence on patterns of L1 use, discussions on its effectiveness and limitations remain largely theoretical, reinforcing the need for systematic research that analyses language choices, influencing factors, and instructional contexts.

A structured, evidence-based approach is crucial to understanding these dynamics and supporting a balanced instructional model—one that integrates L1 strategically while maintaining strong L2 immersion. This study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical insights into Arabic use in university-level EFL instruction, contributing to informed teaching practices, curriculum development, and language policy in Libyan higher education.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to explore how and when Libyan university EFL instructors incorporate Arabic (L1) into their teaching, particularly in English major classrooms. It aims to provide a data-driven understanding of L1 use in instructional practice by:

1. Measuring the frequency of Arabic use in EFL classrooms and identifying the specific teaching situations where it is employed.

2. Determining the key contexts in which L1 is most commonly used, such as grammar instruction, vocabulary clarification, classroom management, and group activities.

By achieving these objectives, the study will offer empirical insights into bilingual pedagogy in EFL instruction, helping educators and policymakers refine best practices for integrating L1 while maintaining strong English immersion strategies in university settings.

Research Questions

To address these objectives, this study examines the following key questions:

1. How frequently do Libyan university EFL instructors use Arabic in their classrooms?
2. In which instructional contexts is L1 most commonly employed?

By answering these questions, the study will provide evidence-based insights into the role of L1 in EFL instruction, informing teaching strategies, curriculum design, and bilingual education policies to enhance English language learning in Libyan universities.

2. Literature Review

The role of L1 in EFL instruction remains a topic of debate, with monolingual approaches advocating for exclusive target language (TL) use, while bilingual pedagogies support strategic L1 integration. Research has increasingly questioned the effectiveness of strict English-only policies, highlighting how L1 can serve as a valuable instructional tool in certain contexts.

While monolingual instruction has traditionally dominated Western EFL classrooms, recent research challenges the assumption that exclusive English use leads to better learning outcomes. Studies show that, despite institutional policies promoting English-only instruction, many teachers pragmatically incorporate L1 to enhance learning efficiency.For example, Krulatz, Neokleous, and Henningsen (2016) found that Norwegian school teachers use L1 for giving instructions, providing feedback, and managing classroom interactions, demonstrating a context-driven approach rather than rigid adherence to monolingual policies. Similarly, Smagul (2024) highlights how Kazakhstani teachers integrate L1 despite institutional pressures favouring English-only instruction, illustrating that policy decisions often overlook classroom realities.Further supporting this, Metruk

(2021) examined Slovak EFL teachers' attitudes towards L1 use, revealing that while they prioritise English, they still rely on L1 for grammar explanations, vocabulary instruction, and contrastive analysis, particularly for lower-proficiency students. These findings suggest that a strict English-only approach does not necessarily yield better results, and that L1's effectiveness depends on factors such as student proficiency, instructional goals, and specific classroom dynamics.By examining these studies, it becomes clear that L1 is not simply a hindrance to language acquisition but can serve as a scaffolding tool when used strategically.

In EFL settings similar to Libya, research highlights a disconnect between restrictive language policies and actual classroom practices. While many institutions enforce English-only policies, studies reveal that instructors frequently use L1 as a necessary tool for learning support.For instance, Alshammari (2011) found that Saudi Arabian EFL instructors use Arabic to clarify complex concepts, supporting the argument that judicious L1 use enhances comprehension rather than hindering it (Cook, 2001). Similarly, Khelalfa and Kellil (2023) demonstrate that, despite Algeria's strict English-only policy, many teachers rely on L1 in practice, showing a clear gap between policy and classroom realities.A similar trend is observed in Turkey, where Solhi and Büyükyazı (2011) found that EFL instructors see L1 as beneficial for beginners but gradually reduce its use as students advance. This aligns with Abdul Rahman's (2021) study on Libyan university students' attitudes, which revealed that first- and second-year students prefer Arabic for comprehension, while third- and fourth-year students use it less as their proficiency improves. These findings suggest that students naturally shift away from L1 reliance over time, reinforcing the argument that a flexible, context-sensitive bilingual approach is more effective than rigid English-only policies.This body of research indicates that policy-driven monolingualism often fails to reflect classroom realities. Instead, a progressive approach, where L1 is gradually reduced as learners gain confidence in English, may offer a more effective and student-centred alternative.

Research on L1 use in Libyan EFL classrooms reflects global trends, showing that while Arabic serves as a valuable teaching tool, concerns remain about over-reliance on L1. Instructors often use Arabic to aid comprehension and reduce student anxiety, but many remain cautious

about excessive dependence, fearing it may hinder English fluency (Elmangoush, 2023).Several studies highlight how and why L1 is used in Libyan classrooms. Adriosh and Razı (2019) identify four key functions of code-switching: clarification, repetition, recapitulation, and socialisation, suggesting that Arabic plays a multifaceted role in instruction. Meanwhile, Mansor (2017) highlights external factors influencing L1 use, such as teacher training limitations and varying student proficiency levels. His findings align with Abdul Rahman (2021), indicating that L1 use is more common among lower-level learners but decreases as students become more proficient in English.

A shift in instructor perceptions is evident in Abdulah (2025), who found that while teachers initially viewed L1 as a valuable aid, institutional policies and concerns about student dependency have led to a more restrictive stance over time. However, L1 continues to be recognised as beneficial for beginners and in explaining complex grammatical concepts, suggesting that strict English-only policies may not reflect actual classroom needs.Another important dimension of L1 use in Libya is translation as a teaching strategy. Mohamed (2014) found that Libyan EFL instructors use translation to check comprehension, build vocabulary, and conduct contrastive analysis. While the role of translation in language learning remains debated, this study supports its controlled, strategic use as an instructional tool, rather than a substitute for English immersion.Collectively, these studies indicate that Arabic continues to play an important role in EFL instruction in Libya, with teachers navigating the balance between bilingual support and English immersion. The findings suggest that a rigid monolingual approach may not be the most effective strategy, reinforcing the need for flexible, research-informed policies that consider both student needs and pedagogical realities.

Research from around the world increasingly challenges the assumption that strict monolingual approaches are the most effective way to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Studies suggest that while L2 immersion is important, L1 can play a valuable role in supporting learning, particularly for lower-proficiency students. Shin, Dixon, and Choi (2019), for example, reviewed empirical studies from 2011 to 2018, concluding that teacher training reforms are essential to optimise bilingual education. Similarly, Hall and Cook (2012) critique the traditional English-only approach, arguing that own-language use is an under-researched but crucial aspect of EFL teaching, particularly in

multilingual settings.Further research highlights how teachers worldwide acknowledge L1's benefits, even when they aim for L2 immersion. Yavuz (2012) and Almoayidi (2018) found that while educators encourage students to engage in English as much as possible, they also recognise L1's cognitive and emotional benefits, such as reducing anxiety and supporting complex explanations. Shabir (2017) examined the views of pre-service teachers, showing that attitudes toward L1 vary based on cultural, institutional, and pedagogical factors, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive bilingual strategies.

Across Western, Middle Eastern, and Libyan contexts, research consistently reveals a disconnect between institutional policies and real classroom practices. While many educational frameworks advocate English-only instruction, empirical evidence suggests that L1 remains a crucial cognitive scaffold, particularly in the early stages of language learning. Studies indicate that students rely more on L1 at lower proficiency levels, but this reliance naturally decreases as their confidence and English ability improve (Abdul Rahman, 2021; Solhi&Büyükyazı, 2011). Despite official restrictions, teachers continue to incorporate L1 strategically, demonstrating the limitations of rigid policies and the need for more flexible, research-based approaches (Khelalfa&Kellil, 2023; Abdulah, 2025).

Moreover, research confirms that L1 does not hinder L2 development when used strategically. Instead, it serves as a support mechanism, particularly in areas such as clarification, grammar instruction, and classroom management (Adriosh&Razı, 2019; Mansor, 2017). As a result, more studies are questioning the effectiveness of strict English-only policies, advocating instead for a balanced, research-informed model of bilingual education (Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2019; Hall & Cook, 2012). These findings highlight the need for teaching strategies that carefully balance L1 support with L2 immersion, ensuring that bilingual pedagogy aligns with real-world learning needs. Future research should further explore the long-term impact of progressive L1 integration, particularly in higher education, to refine best practices in EFL instruction.

3. Methodology

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to explore how frequently Libyan university EFL instructors use Arabic (L1) in their teaching, in what contexts, and what factors influence their

decisions. A structured questionnaire was used to collect standardised, comparable data, enabling statistical analysis of L1 integration patterns. The survey was distributed electronically to 45 university-level EFL instructors from multiple institutions, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in teaching experience, academic qualifications, and institutional policies (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The questionnaire, developed based on bilingual pedagogy frameworks (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007), consisted of three key sections: (1) Frequency of L1 Use, assessing how often instructors incorporate Arabic in their classrooms; (2) Instructional Contexts, identifying specific teaching situations where L1 is employed, such as grammar explanations, vocabulary clarification, and classroom management; and (3) Influencing Factors, examining external and personal factors shaping instructors' decisions, including student proficiency, institutional policies, and pedagogical beliefs. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, with additional Yes/No questions assessing the impact of institutional language policies. To ensure clarity and reliability, the questionnaire underwent pilot testing and expert review, allowing for refinements before full distribution (Field, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical methods in Microsoft Excel, identifying key patterns, trends, and relationships between L1 use, instructor experience, and student proficiency levels. This data-driven approach provides empirical insights into bilingual pedagogy, contributing to evidence-based recommendations for curriculum development and language policy in Libyan higher education. By systematically examining L1 use, this study seeks to inform more effective, research-driven teaching strategies that balance bilingual support with English immersion.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section presents the survey findings, exploring how frequently Libyan university EFL instructors use Arabic (L1) in their teaching, the contexts in which it is employed, and how these patterns relate to teaching experience and student proficiency levels. The analysis provides empirical insights into bilingual pedagogy, contributing to broader discussions on language policy, instructional strategies, and best practices in higher education.

Educational Qualifications of Respondents

Figure 1 illustrates the academic qualifications of the participating EFL instructors, showing that most hold a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree,

while a smaller proportion have a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). This suggests that the majority of instructors have specialised training in English language teaching, linguistics, or literature, whereas Ph.D. holders represent a subset with advanced expertise in EFL education and research.

Figure 1:Qualifications of Respondents

Academic qualifications play a key role in shaping teaching approaches, including attitudes towards L1 use. Instructors with higher qualifications often have greater exposure to linguistic theories and bilingual education frameworks, which may influence how they balance Arabic and English in the classroom.

Years of EFL Teaching Experience

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of teaching experience among university EFL instructors, showing that the majority have considerable professional experience. The largest proportion (around 40%) have been teaching for at least six years, while 35% have over ten years of experience. This suggests that most instructors have spent a significant amount of time in the classroom, shaping their teaching philosophies and approaches to L1 integration.

Figure 2: Years of EFL Teaching Experience

A smaller group of instructors reported having four to five years of experience, reflecting a moderate level of professional exposure. Very few respondents had only three years of teaching experience, indicating that newer instructors were underrepresented in the sample. Additionally, some respondents fell into the 'Other' category, possibly representing educators with intermittent teaching experience

Teaching experience is a key factor in shaping instructors' attitudes towards L1 use. Research suggests that more experienced instructors often use less L1, as they have developed advanced strategies for English-only instruction (Mansor, 2017; Macaro et al., 2020). However, experienced educators may also have a more refined understanding of bilingual pedagogy, recognising that strategic L1 use can enhance comprehension, classroom management, and student engagement (Alsied, 2018; Tiwari, 2024).

Year Levels Taught by Respondents

Figure 3 presents the distribution of university EFL instructors based on the year groups they teach. The largest proportion (35%) primarily work with third-year students, while first- and fourth-year instructors each make up 26% of the sample. Second-year instructors account for only 13%, suggesting that this group is less represented in the study.

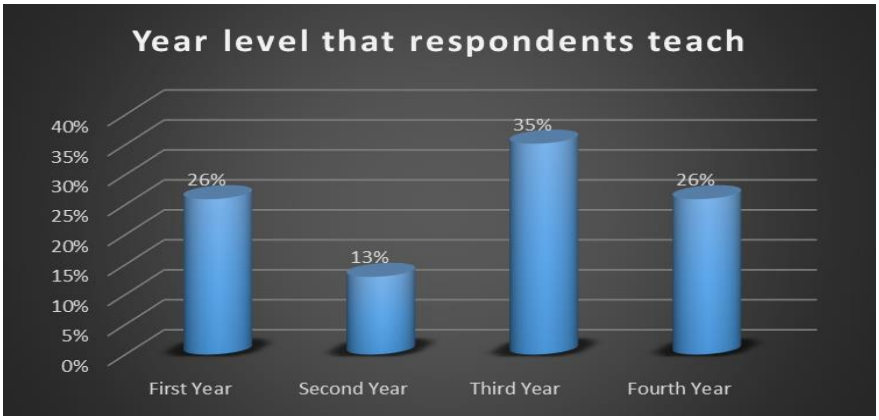

Figure 3: Year Levels Taught by Respondents

These findings offer valuable insights into how L1 use varies across academic levels. Research suggests that students in lower-year levels often rely more on L1, as they have limited English proficiency and require additional linguistic support and scaffolding (Cummins, 2007; Swain &Lapkin, 2000). In contrast, upper-year students are generally more proficient in English, allowing instructors to reduce L1 use and encourage greater engagement with English-only instruction (Mansor, 2017; Alsied, 2018).

With third-year instructors making up the largest group, this study captures a transitional stage in L1 integration, where students are expected to become more independent in their English use but may still benefit from occasional Arabic support, particularly when dealing with complex academic discussions. The representation of first- and fourth-year instructors further enables a comparison between foundational and advanced coursework, helping to build a broader understanding of bilingual strategies in EFL instruction.

Overall Use of Arabic in the EFL Classroom

Figure 4 presents the proportion of university EFL instructors who incorporate Arabic (L1) into their teaching. The findings reveal that around 70% of instructors use Arabic, while 30% follow a strict English-only approach.

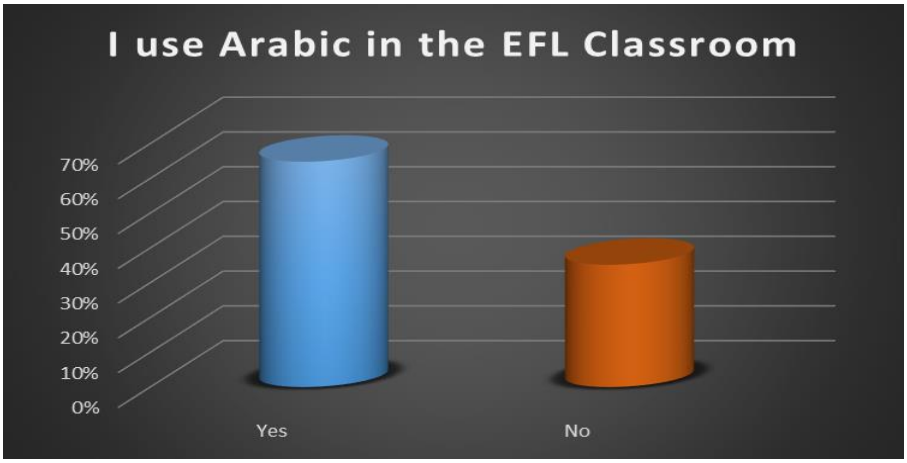

Figure 4: Overall Use of Arabic in the EFL Classroom

This suggests that L1 plays a significant role in EFL instruction in Libyan universities, supporting research that emphasises its pedagogical benefits in enhancing comprehension, reducing student anxiety, and managing classrooms effectively (Cummins, 2007; Alsied, 2018; Tiwari, 2024). Given that students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, Arabic often serves as a linguistic bridge, particularly for lower-proficiency learners who may struggle with complex English concepts (Mansor, 2017).

On the other hand, 30% of instructors actively avoid L1 use, likely reflecting a commitment to full English immersion, an approach rooted in monolingual teaching methodologies such as the Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Krashen, 1985; Harmer, 2007). These instructors prioritise maximum L2 exposure, believing that frequent L1 reliance may undermine students' confidence in using English independently (Elmangoush, 2023).

These findings underscore the ongoing debate between monolingual and bilingual approaches in EFL instruction, raising important questions about the specific instructional contexts in which Arabic is most beneficial.

Attitudes Towards Arabic Use in EFL Classrooms

Figure 5 presents instructors' responses to the statement, "Arabic should never be used in an EFL classroom." The results reveal a divided stance on L1 integration, with 43% agreeing and a further 22% strongly agreeing, indicating that a significant number of instructors prefer to minimise or eliminate Arabic use. This perspective aligns with

monolingual teaching methodologies such as the Direct Method and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which stress maximum English exposure to develop fluency and communicative competence (Krashen, 1985; Harmer, 2007).

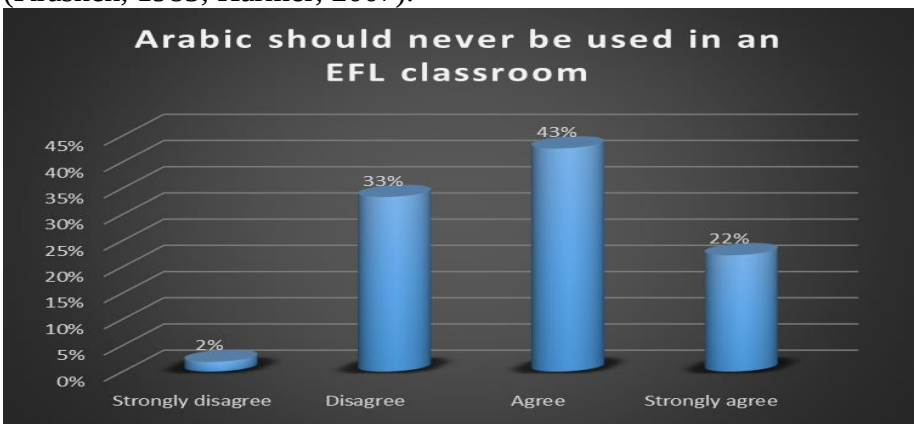

Figure5: Attitudes Towards Arabic Use in EFL Classrooms

However, a notable minority (33%) disagree, with 2% strongly disagreeing, suggesting that many instructors support a controlled, strategic use of L1 in certain contexts. This view aligns with bilingual pedagogy theories, such as Cummins' (1979) Interdependence Hypothesis and Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which argue that L1 can be a valuable cognitive tool, helping to ease comprehension, reduce cognitive overload, and support lower-proficiency learners (Swain &Lapkin, 2000; Alsied, 2018). These instructors likely perceive Arabic as an instructional aid, particularly useful for clarifying complex grammar, explaining abstract concepts, and managing classroom interactions (Mansor, 2017; Tiwari, 2024).

The findings highlight a continuing debate among Libyan university EFL instructors regarding the ideal role of Arabic in language instruction. While many educators advocate for limiting L1 to strengthen English acquisition, others argue that judicious L1 integration can enhance learning without impeding fluency development. These insights contribute to broader discussions on bilingual education, emphasising the need for context-sensitive teaching approaches that maintain English immersion while allowing Arabic support where necessary.

Instructional Contexts Where L1 is Used

Figure 6 presents instructors' views on the most appropriate contexts for using Arabic (L1) in EFL instruction, focusing on grammar instruction, vocabulary explanations, classroom instructions, and discipline management. The findings suggest variations in acceptance, indicating that while instructors see clear benefits in some areas, they remain more cautious in others.

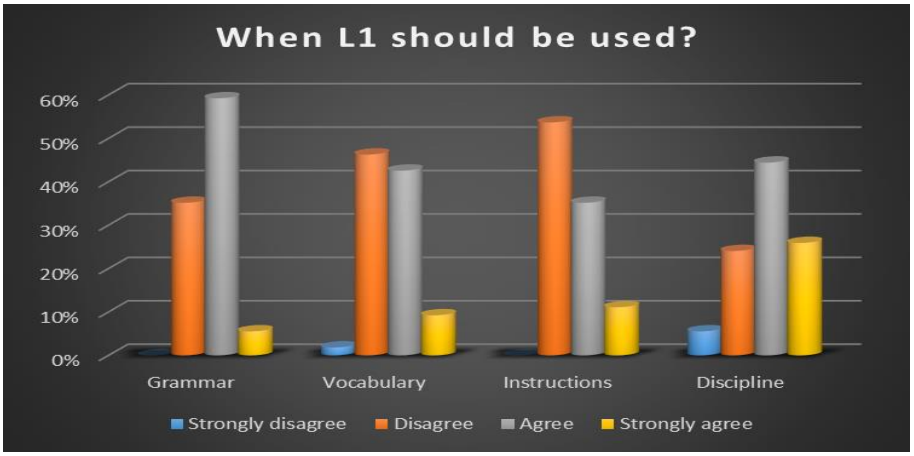

Figure6: Instructional Contexts Where L1 is Used

The strongest support for L1 use is seen in vocabulary explanations and classroom instructions, where a significant number of instructors agree or strongly agree that Arabic enhances comprehension. This aligns with research suggesting that L1 facilitates vocabulary acquisition by helping students grasp meaning, nuances, and contextual usage more effectively (Cummins, 2007; Swain &Lapkin, 2000). Additionally, using Arabic for classroom instructions is perceived as helpful for clarity, student engagement, and time efficiency, particularly for lower-level students who may struggle to follow complex English directives (Mansor, 2017; Alsied, 2018).

In contrast, grammar instruction and discipline management receive mixed responses. While some instructors believe that L1 helps clarify grammar rules, others argue that it may interfere with immersion, preventing students from fully engaging with English syntax (Macaro et al., 2020; Elmangoush, 2023). Similarly, attitudes toward L1 use in classroom discipline are divided—some see it as necessary for maintaining order, while others feel that relying on Arabic undermines an English-only environment.

These findings indicate that instructors favour L1 use in contexts where comprehension is essential, such as vocabulary learning and classroom instructions, while remaining cautious about its role in grammar teaching and discipline management. The results reinforce the importance of a context-sensitive bilingual approach, where L1 is strategically employed to support learning without hindering English proficiency development.

Areas of Teaching Where Arabic is Used

Figure 7 compares instructors' use of Arabic (L1) in group/pair work versus structured learning activities, revealing differences in attitudes towards L1 integration across classroom settings. The findings show that L1 is widely accepted in interactive activities such as group and pair work, while opinions are more divided regarding its role in structured learning tasks.

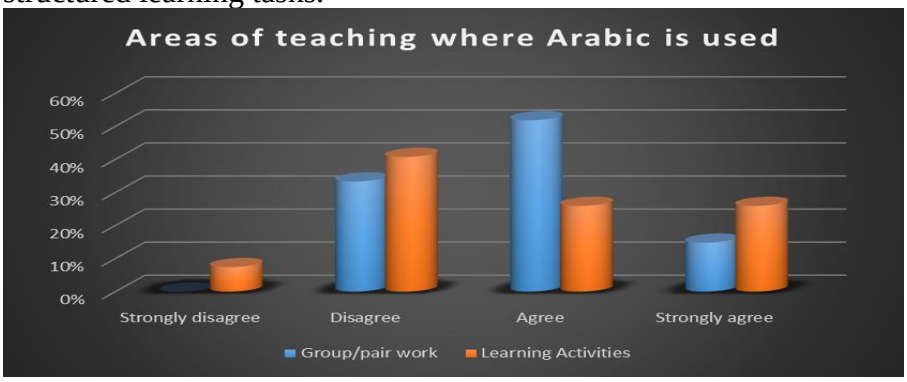

Figure7: Areas of Teaching Where Arabic is Used

A significant number of instructors support L1 use in group and pair work, recognising its role in facilitating peer discussions, clarifying instructions, and fostering collaboration (Cummins, 2007; Alsied, 2018). This aligns with research showing that students naturally switch to L1 in collaborative tasks to negotiate meaning, explain complex ideas, and maintain fluency before transitioning back to English (Swain &Lapkin, 2000; Tiwari, 2024). In such interactive settings, Arabic serves as a cognitive bridge, helping students express themselves more confidently before engaging in L2 communication.

Conversely, L1 use in structured learning activities is more contested, with some instructors supporting its inclusion while others remain cautious. This reflects the ongoing debate on bilingual pedagogy, as structured tasks often require direct engagement with English materials

and an immersion-based approach (Krashen, 1985; Harmer, 2007). Instructors who oppose L1 integration in structured activities argue that excessive reliance on Arabic could prevent students from developing the ability to process information in English, potentially slowing their overall L2 acquisition (Mansor, 2017; Macaro et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings suggest that instructors adopt a more flexible approach to L1 use in interactive and communicative settings, while being more restrictive in structured learning environments where direct L2 input is prioritised. This underscores the need for a context-sensitive strategy, where L1 is selectively employed to support comprehension and engagement, while ensuring that English remains the dominant language of instruction.

L1 Use by Year Level of Students

Figure 8 presents instructors' perspectives on Arabic (L1) use in EFL instruction across different year levels, revealing a clear distinction between those teaching first- and second-year students and those working with third- and fourth-year students.

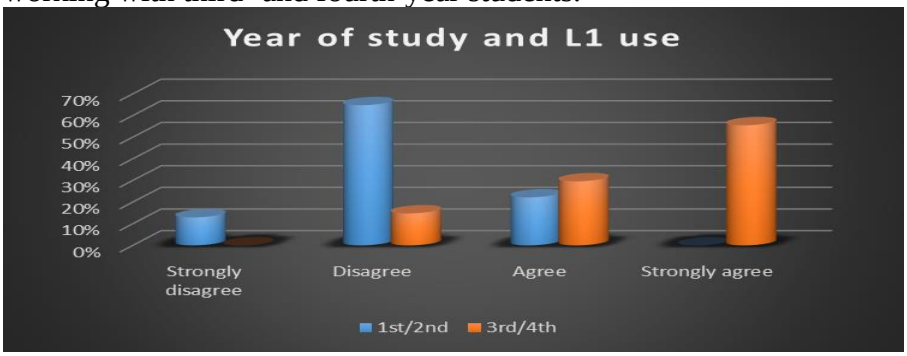

Figure8:L1 Use by Year Level of Students

For first- and second-year students, the majority of instructors oppose the use of L1, suggesting a preference for full English immersion at the early stages of language learning. This aligns with monolingual teaching methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the Direct Method, which advocate maximum exposure to English to accelerate fluency and communicative competence (Krashen, 1985; Harmer, 2007). At this level, instructors may feel that excessive reliance on Arabic could hinder students' confidence in English and encourage linguistic dependence, making it harder for them to develop independent L2 skills (Macaro et al., 2020; Elmangoush, 2023).

However, for third- and fourth-year students, the majority of instructors support the integration of Arabic, suggesting that as students advance in their studies, L1 becomes a valuable scaffolding tool (Cummins, 2007; Swain &Lapkin, 2000). At this stage, learners are often required to engage with complex linguistic and academic content, including specialised terminology, abstract theoretical discussions, and translation studies. In such contexts, strategic L1 use can aid comprehension, facilitate knowledge transfer, and support critical engagement with advanced course materials (Mansor, 2017; Alsied, 2018).

These findings highlight the context-sensitive nature of bilingual pedagogy, where L1 integration is less necessary in foundational courses but becomes increasingly beneficial in advanced instruction. The results suggest that Libyan university EFL instructors adapt their teaching strategies based on students' proficiency and academic needs, favouring an English-only approach at lower levels while employing a more flexible bilingual approach in higher-year courses. The next section will examine how teaching experience and institutional policies further shape these instructional choices.

Attitudes Toward Native-Like Proficiency as a Learning Goal

Figure 9 presents instructors' perspectives on whether EFL university students should aim for native-like proficiency, reflecting ongoing discussions in second language acquisition (SLA) and English language teaching (ELT) regarding the balance between native-like accuracy and communicative competence. The findings reveal divergent views, highlighting shifts in teaching priorities within Libyan higher education.

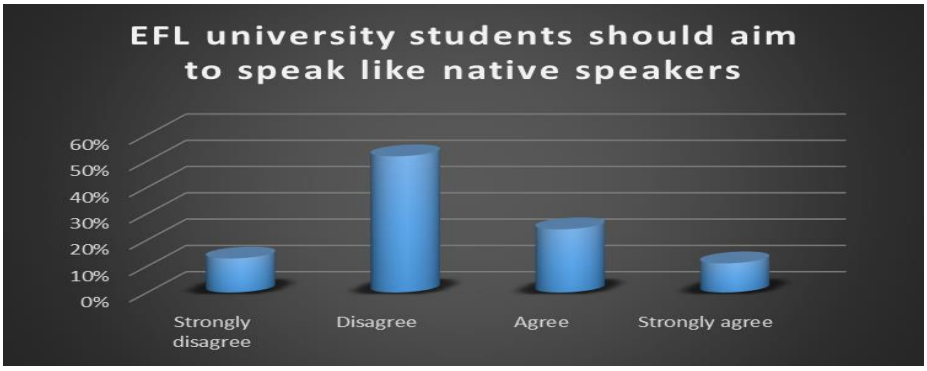

Figure9: Attitudes Toward Native-Like Proficiency as a Learning Goal

A majority of instructors (around 50%) disagree, with a smaller proportion strongly disagreeing, indicating that many educators prioritise intelligibility, fluency, and effective communication over native-like pronunciation. This aligns with Global English and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) perspectives, which advocate for functional language proficiency rather than rigid adherence to native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2011). These instructors likely recognise that achieving native-like proficiency is unrealistic for most learners and that excessive focus on native norms may create unnecessary pressure, potentially undermining students' confidence in using English for real-world communication (Cook, 1999; Matsuda, 2018).

Conversely, around 30% of respondents agree and 10% strongly agree, indicating that a significant minority still regard native-like proficiency as a key objective. This perspective aligns with traditional ELT models, where British and American English norms are often upheld as the linguistic standard (Holliday, 2005; Phillipson, 1992). Some instructors may argue that near-native pronunciation and fluency provide academic and professional advantages, particularly in settings where English proficiency is crucial for employment and higher education (Kachru, 2005; Crystal, 2003).

These findings suggest a gradual shift in teaching philosophies among Libyan university EFL instructors, with an increasing emphasis on communicative competence over native-like accuracy. This aligns with global ELT trends, which promote contextually appropriate English use rather than strict adherence to native norms (Jenkins, 2015; McKay, 2018). The results further support the argument that EFL instruction should prioritise effective communication in diverse international contexts, rather than focusing on accent reduction or native-like pronunciation.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the role of Arabic (L1) in Libyan university EFL classrooms, highlighting the complex balance between bilingual pedagogy, instructor beliefs, and instructional contexts. The results confirm that while many instructors use L1 as a strategic tool to enhance comprehension, support vocabulary acquisition, and manage classroom interactions, opinions on its integration remain divided. Some instructors advocate for a strict English-only approach, believing full immersion fosters fluency, while

others support a context-sensitive bilingual strategy, recognising L1's role in supporting learning and reducing cognitive load. These contrasting perspectives align with ongoing debates in language education, reflecting both theoretical support for L1 scaffolding (Cummins, 2007; Swain &Lapkin, 2000) and concerns about over-reliance on Arabic hindering L2 fluency (Krashen, 1985; Harmer, 2007).

The Frequency and Context of L1 Use in EFL Instruction

The study found that 70% of instructors incorporate Arabic into their teaching, while 30% prefer an English-only approach. This reflects the practical reality of bilingual pedagogy in EFL contexts, particularly where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom (Alsied, 2018; Cummins, 2007). Instructors most commonly use L1 for vocabulary explanations and classroom instructions, reinforcing findings that highlight its role in enhancing comprehension and reducing cognitive strain (Mansor, 2017; Macaro et al., 2020). These functions suggest that Arabic serves as a facilitative tool rather than a replacement for English instruction.

However, opinions on using Arabic for grammar instruction and classroom discipline were more divided. Some instructors view L1 as essential for explaining complex grammatical structures, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. Others, however, worry that over-reliance on L1 may limit students' exposure to English, potentially slowing fluency development—an issue widely discussed in second language acquisition research (Krashen, 1985; Elmangoush, 2023). This mixed perspective aligns with Abdul Rahman (2021), who found that student reliance on L1 naturally decreases as English proficiency improves. Rather than rejecting L1 outright, the study suggests that its role should evolve, supporting learners in the early stages while being gradually reduced as they gain confidence and competence in English.

Institutional policies and shifting pedagogical attitudes further shape instructors' approaches to L1 use. Abdulah (2025) highlights that while instructors recognise Arabic's benefits in specific learning contexts, institutional expectations often encourage a more cautious stance. These findings reinforce the need for a balanced, evidence-based approach to L1 integration—one that uses Arabic as a support mechanism without hindering students' ability to process and produce English independently (Harmer, 2007; Macaro et al., 2020). By

aligning bilingual teaching strategies with students' evolving proficiency levels, instructors can optimise L1's benefits while maintaining a strong focus on English acquisition.

The Influence of Instructor Experience on L1 Use

The study found that more experienced instructors (6+ and 10+ years) were more likely to incorporate Arabic (L1) in their teaching, whereas less-experienced instructors tended to favour an English-only approach. This pattern reflects broader research suggesting that experienced educators adopt a more flexible and context-sensitive approach to L1 use, recognising its value in enhancing comprehension, supporting engagement, and improving learning efficiency (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007). In contrast, newer instructors often adhere more strictly to monolingual methodologies, likely influenced by teacher training programmes that emphasise English immersion as the ideal model (Macaro, 2005; Salem, 2019).

This divide highlights a key challenge in EFL teacher training: while research increasingly supports judicious and strategic L1 use, many training programmes continue to promote monolingual instruction as the standard (Tiwari, 2024). This suggests a need for curriculum revisions in teacher education, ensuring that novice instructors are equipped with evidence-based bilingual strategies rather than rigid, immersion-based frameworks. Institutional policies also appear to shape instructor behaviour, with some universities enforcing strict English-only environments, while others allow greater flexibility in bilingual teaching. These findings emphasise the importance of aligning institutional policies with research-backed bilingual strategies, ensuring that instructors can optimise L1 use without compromising students' English proficiency development.

A Shift Toward Bilingual Pedagogy in Advanced Courses

The study revealed a clear distinction in L1 use based on the academic year level of students. Instructors teaching first- and second-year students were more inclined to restrict Arabic use, whereas those working with third- and fourth-year students were more supportive of integrating L1. This trend suggests that L1 use progressively increases as students advance in their studies, reflecting research that highlights the evolving role of L1 in higher-level learning (Cummins, 2007; Swain &Lapkin, 2000).These findings challenge the conventional assumption that L1 use should automatically decrease as students gain proficiency in English. Instead, they suggest that L1 remains valuable in advanced

courses, where students engage with complex linguistic structures, abstract theoretical concepts, and specialised academic content (Mansor, 2017; Alsied, 2018). This aligns with bilingual education models that emphasise the cognitive and metalinguistic benefits of L1 use at higher levels, rather than limiting it to lower-proficiency learners (Macaro, 2020; Tiwari, 2024).The results underscore the importance of a flexible, differentiated approach to bilingual pedagogyone that adjusts L1 use according to students' academic progression and cognitive demands, rather than enforcing a uniform, one-size-fits-all policy.

Attitudes Toward Native-Like Proficiency and Its Implications for L1 Use

The study revealed a shift away from the traditional belief that students should aim for native-like proficiency in English. Half of the instructors disagreed with this notion, while only a small proportion (10%) strongly agreed, reflecting a growing emphasis on functional communicative competence rather than perfect pronunciation or fluency. This aligns with perspectives from Global Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which prioritise effective communication over rigid adherence to native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2011).

This evolving perspective has direct implications for L1 integration in EFL instruction. Instructors who prioritise communicative effectiveness are more likely to view Arabic as a valuable tool for enhancing learning and interaction (McKay, 2018; Jenkins, 2015). Conversely, those who still advocate for native-like fluency tend to resist L1 use, fearing it might interfere with full immersion and slow L2 acquisition. This ideological divide mirrors broader debates in language teaching, where some educators embrace a pragmatic, bilingual approach, while others adhere to traditional monolingual norms. The findings also echo Abdulah (2025), who found that instructors' attitudes towards L1 have become more restrictive over time due to institutional pressures and evolving pedagogical perspectives.

Toward a Context-Sensitive Bilingual Pedagogy

The findings reaffirm that L1 can be a valuable tool in EFL instruction when used strategically, preventing students from becoming overly dependent on it. The data indicate that Arabic is particularly beneficial for vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and instructional clarity, supporting research on bilingual scaffolding (Cummins, 2007; Swain &Lapkin, 2000). However, concerns about excessive reliance on L1,

especially in grammar instruction and classroom management, suggest that instructors are mindful of the need to maintain sufficient L2 exposure to foster fluency development (Macaro, 2020; Elmangoush, 2023).

The study also highlights the importance of a flexible and context-sensitive approach to L1 use. Rather than rigidly adhering to either a monolingual or bilingual teaching model, instructors should aim for a balanced approach—using L1 as a scaffold while gradually increasing L2 immersion as students' proficiency improves (Cook, 2001; Mansor, 2017). This underscores the need for institutional policies and teacher training programmes to reflect contemporary research in bilingual education, ensuring that L1 is integrated thoughtfully as a support mechanism rather than a barrier to English proficiency.

Implications for Teacher Training and Policy Development

The findings suggest the need for a more balanced approach to teacher training and language policy in Libyan higher education. More experienced instructors appear to use Arabic strategically, indicating that, when applied thoughtfully, L1 can serve as a valuable support tool rather than necessarily hindering L2 acquisition. This implies that professional development programmes could benefit from incorporating research-informed bilingual teaching strategies, moving beyond strictly English-only methodologies (Tiwari, 2024; Alsied, 2018). Teacher training might also consider integrating practical techniques for L1 scaffolding, ensuring that Arabic is used in a way that supports, rather than replaces, English immersion.

Institutional policies may also need to adopt a more flexible approach, as a rigid monolingual model may not fully address the diverse needs of students at different proficiency levels (Macaro et al., 2020). Encouraging selective L1 use where it appears to enhance comprehension, particularly for complex academic content, while maintaining English as the primary medium of instruction, could offer a more effective pedagogical approach. This would allow Arabic to function as a cognitive aid rather than a fallback mechanism, potentially helping students develop confidence in English communication while benefiting from structured linguistic support.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides valuable insights into the ways Arabic (L1) is utilised in Libyan university EFL classrooms, highlighting both its strategic advantages and the varying perspectives of instructors. The

findings indicate that L1 is most commonly used for vocabulary instruction, comprehension support, and classroom management, though opinions remain divided on its role in grammar instruction and fluency development. More experienced instructors appear to adopt a more flexible bilingual approach, whereas less-experienced teachers tend to favour English-only methodologies, reflecting the impact of teacher training and institutional policies. Additionally, L1 integration varies based on student proficiency, with greater use in advanced courses, aligning with research advocating for bilingual scaffolding in complex academic discussions. The study also suggests a gradual shift away from native-speaker models, with many instructors prioritising communicative competence over native-like fluency, reflecting perspectives from Global Englishes and ELF research.

To enhance EFL instruction, teacher training programmes could benefit from integrating bilingual teaching strategies, equipping instructors with effective methods for L1 scaffolding while maintaining strong L2 immersion. Universities may also consider adopting more flexible language policies that allow for context-sensitive bilingual support rather than rigid English-only models. Additionally, differentiating L1 use by student proficiency—ensuring greater English exposure at lower levels while permitting strategic Arabic support in advanced academic contexts—could improve learning outcomes. Institutions should also prioritise communicative competence over native-like pronunciation, incorporating Global Englishes perspectives to prepare students for diverse linguistic environments.

Future research should explore student perspectives on L1 use, assess the long-term impact of bilingual teaching strategies, and compare institutional approaches to L1 integration to identify best practices. Observational studies could offer a more accurate depiction of actual L1 use in classrooms, while research into digital learning tools could examine their role in bilingual instruction. By adopting a balanced, research-driven approach to L1 use, Libyan universities could enhance bilingual pedagogy, ensuring effective language instruction that strengthens both English proficiency and academic success.

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