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A Comparative Study of Non-English Major Saudi Students' Perceptions toward Using Arabic in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examined gender dynamics in Saudi students' perceptions of the use of their first language (L1; Arabic) in English classrooms. Using a mixed-methods approach, I used a questionnaire with 400 students (200 men, 200 women) that assessed their attitudes towards using L1 for vocabulary, grammar, classroom atmosphere, anxiety reduction, and teacher approachability. There is a lot of gender difference: Females report much more positive attitudes toward L1 use on all factors, especially for vocabulary, grammar, anxiety reduction, and teacher approachability. L1 gives reassurance and lowers anxiety for women, who value it qualitatively, but men prioritize L2 exposure and L2 proficiency (hence express less of a preference for L1). Overall, while the differences in classroom atmosphere are not statistically significant, the broad patterns of the findings indicate that women are more likely to perceive that L1 use helped to reduce anxiety and to facilitate comprehension. These findings reinforce the notion that gender influences the ways in which learners view language learning strategies. This study contributes to existing literature by providing more recent evidence from Saudi context, taking into account further consideration of the role of gender and the provision of linguistic support in the EFL classrooms. Strategies for teaching men and women could be revised taking into account these gender-specific differences to better meet emotional and cognitive needs (for example, perhaps women need to be able to use L1 to some extent but in a strategic way), which could in turn promote engagement and make it easier to overcome barriers stemming from EFL.

Keywords: 101 English; English as a Foreign Language; First Language; Student Perceptions; Gender-Based Differences

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1. Introduction

In this study, I explore the use of the first language (L1) in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), a topic sparking considerable debate among educators and researchers worldwide[1, 2]. Many have agreed that using the target language (L2) exclusively maximizes language exposure and enhances learning outcomes[3, 4]. However, recent studies researchers have indicated the benefits of cautiously integrating L1, particularly in multilingual or diverse proficiency contexts[5–7]. L1 is a social tool that enables teachers to leverage its use to keep the activity on track, lower anxiety, facilitate comprehension, and enhance learners' acquisition of challenging grammar and vocabulary[8, 9]. In another example, Debreli and Oyman (2016) discovered that Turkish EFL students gained more confidence and were more responsive when instructors delivered explanations in their L1[7]. In the same vein, Bruen and Kelly (2017) found that Irish learners benefitted from L1 support through a reduced cognitive burden and lower anxiety when language use was in the L1, particularly for tasks that included abstract L2 vocabulary and new parsing strategies[5].

However, the function of L1 in EFL classes is still contentious and changes based on the teaching contexts. English language teaching (ELT) has a long history in Saudi Arabia, where L1–English language policy has played a major role in concentrating on English-only models of instruction. Nonetheless, more recent policy changes have recognized the practical benefits of including L1[10, 11]. There remains relatively little inquiry into the use of students' L1 in Saudi Arabia, although, overall, researchers have found positive responses on L1 use to help with vocabulary translation, grammar explanation, and anxiety reduction within receptive lessons[12]. An underexplored dimension is gender differences in perceptions of L1 integration to support EFL learning.

Mahmud and Sahril (2018) argued that gender significantly influences learners' attitudes and behaviors toward language learning methods[13]. For example, Durán (2006) examined EFL classroom discourse differences between male and female students, demonstrating that gender shapes involvement, willingness, communication styles, and instructional preferences[14]. Similarly, researchers in recent studies indicated that male and female students perceive L1 use differently because they employ distinct learning strategies, such as anxiety coping mechanisms and classroom interactional attitudes[15, 16]. Additionally, teachers' perceptions of gender may indirectly affect their teaching practices, creating favorable classroom environments for male or female students[17].

Although researchers have extensively studied students' perceptions of L1 use, cross-gender comparisons remain scarce. To address this gap, I conducted a comparative cross-gender investigation of attitudes toward L1 incorporation among Saudi EFL students. I quantitatively assessed the extent to which male and female students perceive L1 as beneficial or detrimental to learning grammar and vocabulary, classroom climate, anxiety reduction, and teacher approachability. Based on these results, I provide qualitative insights into the motivations and experiences underlying these perceptions. By analyzing gender-based differences, I aim to equip educators and policymakers with critical information to refine language instruction methods tailored to learners' needs.

1.1. Research Objectives

I formulated three research objectives:

1. To assess whether there is any significant difference between male and female Saudi EFL students' perceptions of L1 to facilitate learning of L2.
2. To determine whether significant gender-based differences exist in Saudi EFL students' perceptions of the impact of L1 use on classroom atmosphere, teacher approachability, and anxiety reduction.
3. To explore the reasons or experiences that male and female Saudi EFL students provide to explain their preferences and attitudes toward L1 ues in L2 classrooms.

1.2. Research Questions

In accordance with the research objectives, I also devised three research questions:

1. Do male and female Saudi EFL students' perceptions of L1 use to facilitate L2 learning differ significantly?
2. Do significant gender-based differences exist in Saudi EFL students' perceptions of the impact of L1 use on classroom atmosphere, teacher approachability, and

anxiety reduction?

3. What reasons or experiences do male and female Saudi EFL students provide to explain their preferences and attitudes toward L1 use in L2 classrooms?

2. Literature Review

Among controversial debates in the field of language education, I scrutinized the use of students' L1 in teaching EFL. Just as some advocates have contended that teachers should enforce avoidance of L1 to achieve a monolingual classroom, others have claimed that L1 represents pedagogical gold[18]. Many researchers have examined both the disadvantages and advantages of the incorporation of L1.

Mahmud and Sahril (2018) explored the differences in gender learning strategies of EFL students in the Indonesian context[13]. The main distinction that Mahmud and Sahril found between female and male students was the various levels of language learning approaches and motivation, for example in terms of adopting strategies or classroom participation. When required, female students employed L1 to explain grammar and vocabulary that were too difficult, whereas male students only applied L1 under certain circumstances in the belief that L1 usage might impede L2 learning success, thus minimizing L1 usage as much as possible to maximize their exposure to English[13]. These findings indicate that L1 use in language learning contexts may be affected by general differences. Such results are directly relevant to the research questions of the present study in that they lend credence to the notion that men and women may experience the use of L1 in the EFL classroom quite differently. Specifically, they reinforce Research Questions 1 and 3, in which I investigate gender-based differences and the underlying reasons for students' attitudes toward L1 use in learning English.

Durán (2006) observed gender differences in the classroom interaction and learner confidence in Colombian EFL settings. Consistent with his observations, Durán found that when facing language tasks, female students used L1 more because they showed higher anxiety compared to male students. This consequently resulted in further L1 domain reliance on teacher support for coping skills. This indicates that the emotional distress in L2 learning transferred to the preference for L1 because it would provide them with emo-tional security and clarity on how to survive/tackle complex tasks. Although male learners considered L1 as beneficial for language improvement, they were less anxious about using it and were interacting mostly in English. Durán also investigated the affective and psychological aspects of L1 ideological paradigms throughout languages and cultures in language education[14].

The subtlety of gender influence on L1 usage in EFL classes has recently been highlighted in many research. Azkarai (2016) found that in a task-based study female students used their first language more than male students did, indicating that gender might be related to communicative strategies and comfort as well as L2 use[19]. Likewise, Veldarrama (2023) reported that although students recognized the advantages of L1 use for clarifying multileveled grammar as well as vocabulary, they cautioned against overstimulation to avoid dependency and argued for its strategic integration, with female learners notably more supportive[20]. In furtherance of these results, Tran (2023) conducted a study looking at the effects of gender as well as L1 conceptual transfer on English prepositional use and found that in post-tests female students performed significantly better than males despite having similar performances in pre-tests, and that L1 influence had a significant effect on language acquisition[21]. Collectively, these studies offer timely evidence for gender-sensitive pedagogy and for the regulated incorporation of L1 usage as a means to improve learning outcomes in EFL contexts.

In one of the initial studies to exploring L1 use in Algerian EFL classrooms, Khelalfa and Kellil (2023) examined teachers' beliefs about its necessity. Overall, they detected a positive attitude toward limited L1 use, especially for grammar rules and vocabulary item translations. Regarding L1, students regarded its selective use as a vital device to prevent cognitive overload, particularly for less proficient students. As for the genders, female students used L1 more because they were more anxious and needed to comprehend, whereas male students were more likely to want to use English as much as possible[15].

In a similar manner, Orfan (2023) explored the preferences and behaviors of Afghan EFL teachers toward L1 use in the classroom. Orfan found that overall teachers recognized the pedagogical gains of selective use of L1, such as enhanced understanding and a more relaxed environment in which to learn. However, how students practiced L1 varied

across genders, in that female teachers used it more often as a means of bonding and reducing students' anxiety, indicating that instructors' gendered beliefs can have a profound impact on their practices and their classroom culture[16].

In Slovakia, Metruk and Rafajdusová (2024) investigated teachers' perceptions toward utilizing L1 within English teaching. The teachers reported that they appreciated the usefulness of L1 for facilitating learners to understand complex linguistics elements including new or difficult languages/topics[17]. Interestingly, Metruk and Rafajdusová found pronounced gender differences in teachers' attitudes: compared to male teachers, female teachers were far more supportive of using L1 as a management tool and for emotional support, whereas male teachers needed to teach English as much as possible to expose the students to the L2[17]. This underscores the critical role of instructors as gendered perceivers in classroom language policies and student experiences.

At Iowa State University, Al Sharaeai (2012) also focused on the student perspectives on L1 in EFL classrooms. The author confirmed the finding of students' attitudes toward L1 use being nuanced and context-dependent, and the participants acknowledged the situation-specific advantages of some use of L1 in clarifying problematic grammatical features. However, gender-specific patterns emerged: Female students showed a greater preference for L1 use to reduce anxiety and clarify linguistic concepts, whereas male students emphasized maintaining English exclusivity to enhance proficiency[22].

Bartlett (2018) surveyed university students' preferences for L1 use in Japanese EFL classrooms, finding overall positive attitudes toward using L1 for explaining grammar and vocabulary, particularly among lower-proficiency students. This finding supports the argument for strategic L1 use to facilitate language learning[23]. Bruen and Kelly (2017) demonstrated that using a shared L1 effectively reduced cognitive overload and anxiety among learners, providing empirical evidence of improved language comprehension and emotional comfort in the classroom[5].

Debreli and Oyman (2016) argued for reevaluating English-only policies, noting that Turkish EFL learners preferred L1 use for clarifying linguistic concepts and maintaining motivation[7]. Galali and Cinkara (2017) provided insights from Iraqi tertiary students, demonstrating that judicious L1 use significantly improved classroom engagement and language comprehension, advocating a balanced instructional approach[8]. Payne and Contreras (2019) showed that Ecuadorian students held positive perceptions of translation and occasional L1 use, highlighting its necessity, particularly at lower proficiency levels, to enhance comprehension and learning effectiveness[24].

I conclude that perceptions of L1 use in EFL classrooms are complex, variable, and gender sensitive. L1 integration effectively reduces anxiety, improves understanding, and manages classroom behaviors, but gender-related factors such as emotional, cognitive, and pedagogical differences moderate these effects. Exploring gendered perceptions can provide educators with useful insights to enhance pedagogy and create more gender-inclusive, effective language learning environments.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Context and Participants

I conducted this study in Saudi Arabia to examine the role of L1 use in English language classrooms, focusing on gender differences in Saudi EFL students' understanding of classroom activities. I surveyed 400 students (200 male, 200 female), selected participants from various departments at Qassim University to ensure diversity in English proficiency levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, and exposure to English language instruction. All participants were Saudi native speakers enrolled in 101 ENG classes.

3.2. Research Instrument

I devised the research instrument in two sections. The first section was a survey questionnaire with a Likert scale[9], with 14 items measuring students' perceptions and attitudes about the classroom use of L1 (Arabic) to facilitate learning English. I assessed responses on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This Likert scale assessed multiple items, including students' perspectives on being able to learn grammar and vocabulary, class atmosphere, anxiety level, and teacher approachability. For example, an item from the questionnaire was "Translation of English words into Arabic makes it easier for me to recall vocabulary." Second, I included two qualitative open-ended

questions to elicit students' motivations and background experiences influencing their perceptions of L1 use in EFL classes. I specifically asked students to describe conditions or examples that justified their beliefs about L1 use in EFL and learning.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data using online survey questionnaires administered through Google Forms. English language teachers at Qassim University facilitated the process by informing students about the research. The teachers explained the research aims, emphasizing that participation was voluntary and that responses were confidential and anonymous.

I analyzed the quantitative data from the questionnaires using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) to provide a general overview of perceptions. I then conducted independent samples t tests to determine whether significant differences existed in how male and female students perceived various aspects of L1 use. I used t tests because they are appropriate for identifying significant differences between two groups[25].

I thematically analyzed the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines[26]. This process included transcribing the responses, becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for potential themes based on coded data, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report[26]. This analysis resulted in two broad thematic categories regarding reasons for and against L1 use in the English classroom. This qualitative analysis allowed for a deeper interpretation of the gendered differences suggested by the quantitative findings and thus strengthened the study's conclusions.

4. Results

In this section, I present the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses, aligned with the research objectives. I present and discuss results comparatively across genders regarding attitudes toward the use of L1 in English language classrooms among Saudi EFL students.

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

4.1.1. Research Objective 1

My first objective was to assess if there is any significant difference between male and female Saudi EFL students' perceptions regarding the use of L1 to facilitate learning of L2. To address this objective, I examined descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and independent samples t tests. I present the results of these tests in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Gender-Based Perceptions of L1 Use for Linguistic Understanding.

Item	Gender	N	M	SD	t-Value	p
Vocabulary understanding	Male	200	3.85	0.90	2.45	0.015
	Female	200	4.10	0.85		
Grammar understanding	Male	200	3.70	1.05	3.05	0.002
	Female	200	4.05	0.88		

I analyzed the quantitative data to explore gender-related differences in Saudi EFL students' perceptions of L1 use. In the first research objective, I sought to determine whether a significant difference existed between male and female students regarding the perceived effectiveness of L1 in aiding comprehension of English grammar and vocabulary. Independent samples t tests revealed significant differences for both vocabulary understanding ($t = 2.45$, $p = 0.015$) and grammar understanding ($t = 3.05$, $p = 0.002$). Female students reported higher mean scores than males did for both vocabulary ($M = 4.10$ vs. $M = 3.85$) and grammar ($M = 4.05$ vs. $M = 3.70$), indicating that females perceived L1 use as more helpful and held more positive attitudes toward its use for linguistic understanding compared to male students. These results directly answer Research Question 1, confirming that female students perceive L1 use as significantly more helpful for understanding English grammar and vocabulary than male students do. This supports the hypothesis that gender influences learners' attitudes toward L1 support in foundational language skills. I created a bar graph to represent these differences visually (see **Figure 1**). The graph illustrates the difference in mean perception scores between

male and female students regarding how Arabic (L1) use can improve vocabulary and grammar understanding, showing that female students rated L1 use significantly higher than male students did. For example, the bar representing female students' perception of L1 use in vocabulary understanding reached a mean score of 4.10, compared to 3.85 for male students, whereas for grammar understanding, females averaged 4.05 versus 3.70 for males. I displayed these vi-

sual differences clearly using side-by-side color-coded bars (blue for men, pink for women), making the gender gap immediately noticeable. The height of each bar reflected the mean score, allowing viewers to quickly grasp which gender perceived L1 use as more beneficial in specific areas. This visual approach helped emphasize statistical significance in a more intuitive and accessible way for readers.
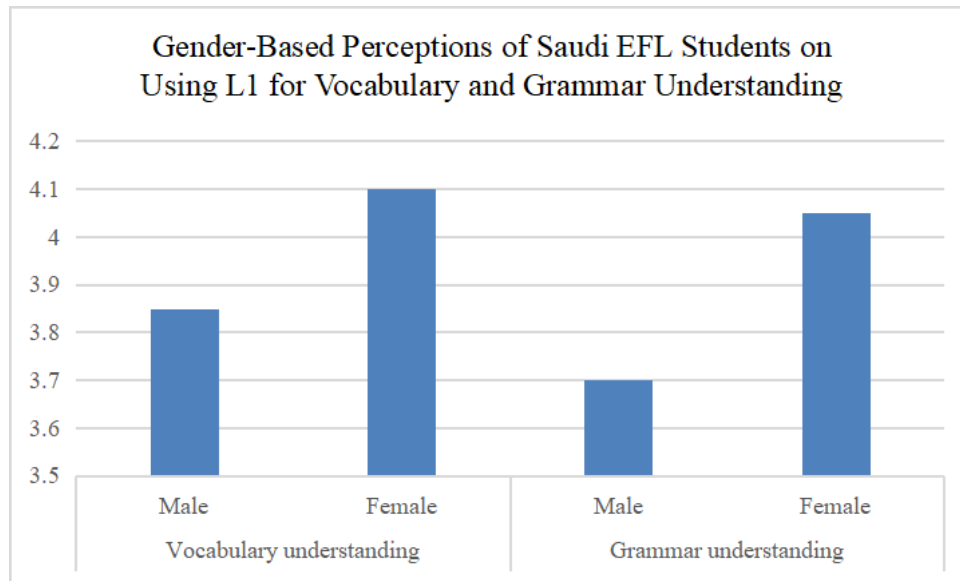

Figure 1. Gender Differences in Mean Ratings of L1 Use for Vocabulary and Grammar Understanding.

4.1.2. Research Objective 2

In the second research objective, I sought to determine whether significant gender-based differences existed in Saudi EFL students' perceptions of L1's impact on classroom at-

mosphere, teacher approachability, and anxiety reduction.

I analyzed descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and independent samples t tests to address this objective. I present the results in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Gender-Based Perceptions of L1 Use on Classroom Factors.

Item	Gender	N	M	SD	t-Value	p
Classroom atmosphere	Male	200	3.90	0.95	1.85	0.065
	Female	200	4.10	0.90		
Anxiety reduction	Male	200	3.95	1.00	2.60	0.010
	Female	200	4.20	0.85		
Teacher approachability	Male	200	3.80	1.02	2.35	0.019
	Female	200	4.05	0.90		

I examined gender differences in perceptions of whether L1 use positively influenced the classroom atmosphere, reduced anxiety, and made the teacher more approachable. Independent samples t tests showed statistically significant gender differences for anxiety reduction ($t = 2.60$, $p = 0.010$), and

teacher approachability ($t = 2.35$, $p = 0.019$). Female students agreed more strongly than male students did that L1 reduced anxiety ($M = 4.20$ vs. $M = 3.95$) and made the teacher more approachable ($M = 4.05$ vs. $M = 3.80$). For classroom atmosphere, the difference between female ($M = 4.10$) and male

students ($M = 3.90$) was not statistically significant (t (398) = 1.85, $p = 0.065$), assuming an alpha level of 0.05. I created a bar graph to illustrate these gender-specific attitudes toward the impact of L1 use on classroom atmosphere, anxiety reduction, and teacher approachability (see **Figure 2**). The graph shows that female students expressed significantly stronger agreement than male students did regarding anxiety reduction and teacher approachability, with a slight, nonsignificant difference in classroom atmosphere.

I also created a radar chart for a comprehensive visualization of gender-based differences in perceptions across all measured items (see **Figure 3**). The radar chart visualizes multiple dimensions simultaneously, clearly highlighting areas of difference and patterns between genders. It illustrates that female students consistently reported higher mean scores than male students did across all dimensions, providing strong visual evidence of gender-based differences in attitudes toward L1 use.
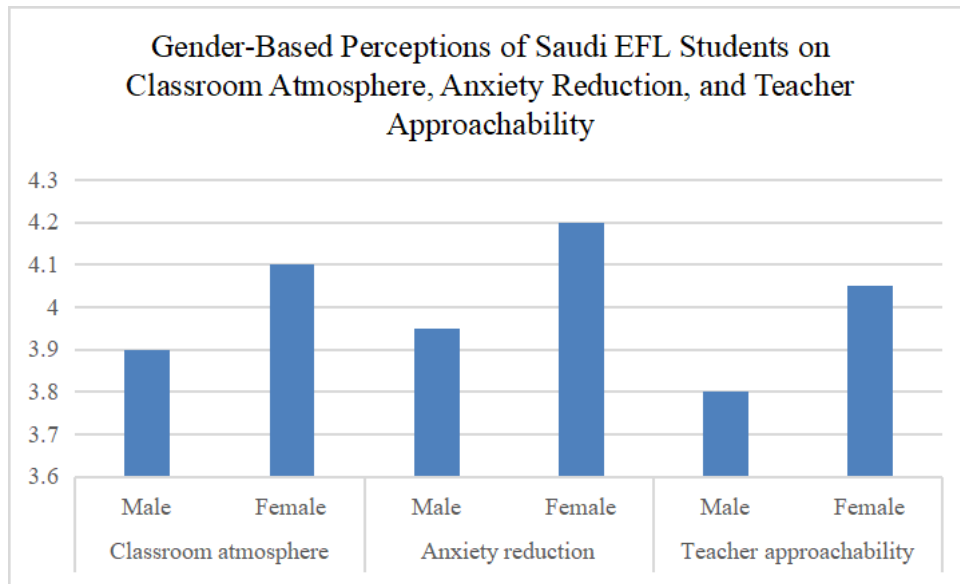

Figure 2. Gender Differences in Mean Ratings of L1 Use Impact on Classroom Atmosphere, Anxiety Reduction, and Teacher Approachability.
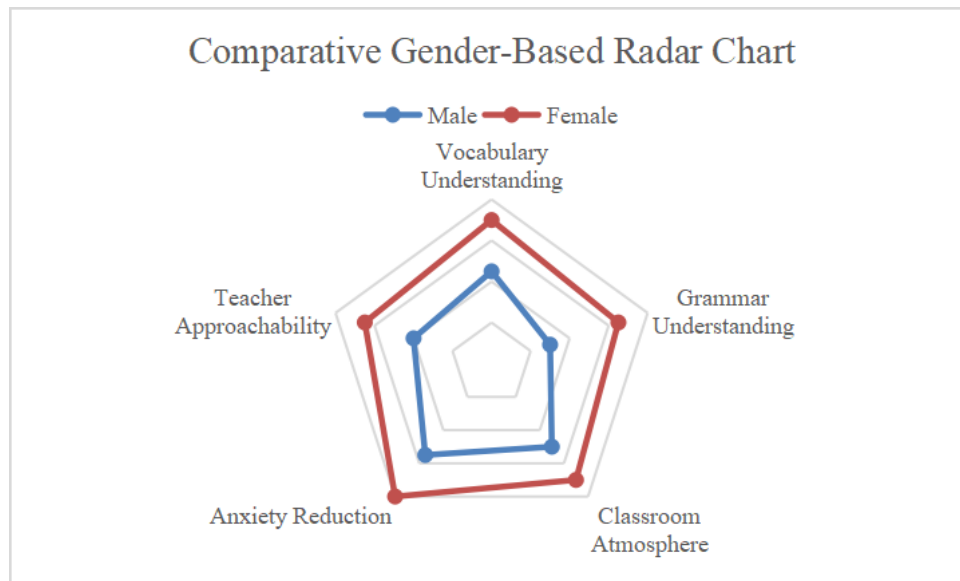

Figure 3. Comparative Radar Chart of Mean Gender-Based Perceptions on L1 Use Factors.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis

In the third research objective, I explored reasons or experiences male and female Saudi EFL students provided to explain their preferences and attitudes toward the use of L1 in L2 classrooms. I identified two main themes through thematic analysis: (a) reasons supporting L1 use in L2 classrooms and (b) reasons opposing L1 use in L2 classrooms.

Reasons Supporting L1 Use in L2 Classrooms. Students identified comprehension support, emotional assistance, and anxiety reduction as significant reasons for advocating L1 use in L2 classrooms. Female students particularly emphasized emotional support and anxiety reduction as key benefits. In contrast, male students were more explicit than female students in highlighting the practical and cognitive role of L1 for academic support, such as clarifying complex concepts. **Table 3** presents illustrative excerpts related to the first theme.

Table 3. Illustrative Student Excerpts Supporting L1 Use in L2 Classrooms.

Gender	Excerpts
Female	- When teachers use Arabic, it feels less stressful to participate and ask questions. - L1 explanations allow me to grasp difficult concepts better, especially when the English explanation is unclear. - The use of Arabic makes class more welcoming, and I feel less embarrassed when making mistakes.
Male	- Arabic translations are necessary for understanding complex grammar, helping me learn faster. - Using Arabic occasionally helps me remember vocabulary better because I understand the meaning clearly. - Difficult grammar topics become easier when explained in Arabic, which helps improve my overall English.

Reasons Opposing L1 Use in L2 Classrooms. Conversely, some students expressed concerns that excessive L1 use would obstruct their English language learning, especially male students who emphasized maximizing English use. Although all students acknowledged the potential benefits of L1 use in classroom contexts, they did not recommend overreliance on L1. However, many female students were contented that L1 was used, but at the same time, they were concerned that excessive use of L1 might lead to fewer opportunities for speaking English. **Table 4** presents illustrative excerpts related to this theme.

Through the qualitative analysis, not only were differences found between the two genders, but also different tendencies were seen among individuals of the same gender in terms of L1 use. Finally, several female students regarded L1 as instrumental in easing stress and promoting involvement, highlighting the emotional and supportive roles of L1. Male students, however, highlighted the cognitive advantages of L1 while being more insistent on the need for maximized English exposure to enhance language acquisition.

Table 4. Illustrative Student Excerpts Opposing L1 Use in L2 Classrooms.

Gender	Excerpts
Female	- While Arabic can be helpful, overusing it means fewer chances to practice authentic communication in English. - Using English consistently, despite challenges, eventually makes us better learners by improving our language skills quickly. - Too much L1 reduces the motivation to immerse ourselves in learning and practicing English.
Male	- Frequent Arabic usage in class limits our opportunity to practice English speaking and listening. - I think using only English pushes us to improve faster because we have no alternative but to learn it actively. - Continuous English exposure is essential; using Arabic too often makes us rely less on our listening skills.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that gender influences Saudi EFL students' perceptions of L1 use. Female students tended to perceive L1 more positively for mediating affect and aiding conceptualization, whereas male students preferred maximized English exposure, believing it to be more efficient for language acquisition.

5. Discussion

This study revealed substantial gender differences in Saudi EFL students' perceptions of L1 use in English classrooms. Female students held significantly more positive attitudes toward L1 use compared to their male counterparts, particularly regarding vocabulary and grammar comprehen-

sion, anxiety reduction, and teacher approachability. This research highlights the role of L1 use in focused group discussions and points to further pedagogical implications for why and how educators should use L1 more strategically, especially during instruction delivered to female learners where L1 may be used for higher order comprehension and increased emotional transmission. L1 is sometimes used for grammar that is too complex to explain in L2 class or to lower anxiety in the classroom, which can all contribute to a more equitable learning environment. Conversely, male students' preference for English immersion implies a need for more communicative, L2-rich activities that support their motivation for direct language exposure. Thus, adopting a flexible, gender-responsive teaching approach can help optimize learning outcomes for diverse student groups in EFL contexts.

These findings align with Durán (2006), who reported that male students preferred L1-supported instruction less than female students did, possibly because female learners often experience higher language anxiety and perceive greater emotional and cognitive support through L1 use [14]. Similarly, Mahmud and Sahril (2018) found that female Indonesian EFL students used L1 to manage comprehension difficulties and reduce the mental workload in language learning [13].

Male students' lower preference for extensive L1 use corresponds with findings from Khelalfa and Kellil (2023) and Orfan (2023). Both studies' authors noted that male students often believe maximizing English input is more effective because extensive L1 use restricts language acquisition opportunities [15, 16]. These results also corroborate those of Bartlett (2018), who identified concerns among students, particularly men, about L1 dependency and its potential negative impact on L2 pragmatic skills [23].

The notable gender gap in perceptions of anxiety reduction and teacher approachability further supports prior literature. For example, Bruen and Kelly (2017) found that strategic L1 use by teachers can alleviate cognitive overload and anxiety, thereby increasing learner confidence [5]. Similarly, Galali and Cinkara (2017) concluded that appropriate L1 use fosters rapport between teachers and students, creating a more favorable learning environment, especially for female learners who may experience higher anxiety in foreign language contexts [8].

Despite these advantages, several researchers caution against overreliance on L1. Payne and Contreras (2019) argued that although purposeful and moderated L1 use enhances effectiveness, particularly for lower-proficiency learners, overdependence can hinder exposure to authentic L2 environments [24]. Similarly, Metruk and Rafajdusová (2024) emphasized the need for balance in L1 use, advocating a teaching paradigm where the benefits of L1 do not compromise necessary exposure to English [17].

For visual synthesis of key findings, **Figure 4** summarizes the persistent gender-based differences in perceptions of L1 use.
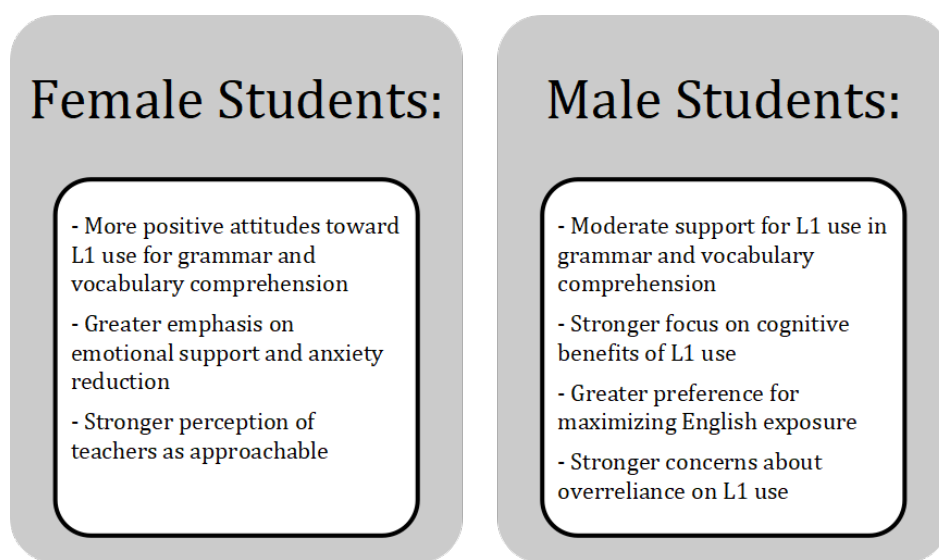
Figure 4. Summary of Gender-Based Differences in Perceptions of L1 Use in EFL Classrooms.

These findings have educational implications for EFL teachers and curriculum developers, highlighting the need for differentiated instructional methods. Teachers should employ L1 strategically to promote comprehension and emotional comfort, particularly among female students, while ensuring ample English exposure to support male students' language proficiency goals. Future researchers should explore how cultural factors, such as Saudi Arabia's gender-segregated education system, may influence these perceptions.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated Saudi EFL students' perceptions of L1 use in English classrooms, focusing on similarities and differences between male and female students. The study found considerable gender differences in the perceived role of L1 in supporting grammar and vocabulary comprehension, reducing anxiety, and influencing teacher approachability. For instance, female students showed significantly higher agreement than male students on the usefulness of L1 in grammar comprehension (M = 4.05 vs. M = 3.70, $p = 0.002$), highlighting their stronger preference for L1 support in understanding complex language structures. Compared to male students, female students consistently rated L1 use more positively for cognitive and emotional support, reporting greater reliance on L1 to reduce anxiety and enhance classroom accessibility. Although male students acknowledged the practical utility of L1 for clarifying complex concepts, they expressed a stronger desire for maximized English exposure, believing it facilitates quicker proficiency development. The quantitative results pointed in the direction of different underlying reasons for these perceptions among men and women, which the qualitative analysis confirmed. It further suggests the need for a balanced pedagogical approach as a way of learning preferred by female students. Future researchers should investigate the impact of differentiated instructional approaches (e.g., selective L1 integration vs. immersive English-only environment) on the sustainability of L2 proficiency and the motivation of learners across sexes in EFL settings. This suggests that through purposeful and graduated use of the L1, teachers can provide just the right amount of emotional and cognitive support, at the same time as providing spaces for English immersion. Awareness of such gender biases and modifying pedagogical practices accordingly can facilitate greater pedagogical effectiveness and result in a more gender-sensitive and positive EFL learning milieu. This underscores the need for inclusion of gender-sensitive language strategies in national education policies. This review suggests policymakers should consider flexible L1 use and population-based frameworks, as well as customized training programs for teachers, not to mention curricular attention to both equity reforms and effectiveness reforms in EFL education. Future researchers should explore the influence of teacher training on the perceptions related to the use of L1 by male and female teachers.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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