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Students' Attitudes Toward Using Farsi in EFL Classrooms at Ghor Institute of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT: *There have been contradictory views about whether the first language (L1) should be used or avoided in EFL classrooms. While its advocates support its use in EFL classes, its opponents claim that it should be avoided. The purpose of this study was to explore students' attitudes toward using Farsi (L1) in EFL classrooms at the Ghor Institute of Higher Education. The data were collected through a questionnaire from 150 English-major undergraduates at the English Department and analyzed quantitatively. The results indicated that although a great majority supported English as the only medium of instruction, they held positive attitudes toward L1 inclusion in the EFL classes to some extent. It was also found that a large proportion of students used L1 mainly to translate words from English into Farsi as well as passages for better comprehension. Moreover, the results revealed that most students agreed that their teachers should utilize English (L2) as much as possible in the classes and also showed that their teachers used L1 primarily to translate abstract words and give instructions. The results may help scholars, teachers, and policymakers better understand students' attitudes about the use of L1, particularly in the Afghan context.*

Keywords: attitudes, Afghan, EFL classrooms, English (L2), Farsi (L1)

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an extensive body of literature on the use of the mother tongue (L1) in EFL classrooms. In fact, the use of L1 has long been a highly controversial issue among language experts and practitioner-teachers in foreign language teaching (Campa & Hossein, 2009). While some scholars and educators exclude L1 use from the classroom, others encourage it in EFL classrooms. For instance, Zulfikar (2018) argues that the use of L1 in an EFL classroom does not impede the learning process. It is actually a facilitating tool used in the class to aid L2 learning acquisition. Similarly, Miles (2008) believes that the limited use of the native language hamper the process of learning a second language; rather, it facilitates it. Akulova (2019) also believes that L1 use in EFL classrooms can have a positive effect on learners' language acquisition since it helps them understand grammar, vocabulary, and complex concepts. Contrary to the view that using the mother tongue plays a positive role in L2 learning, a number of authors, including Levine (2003), Littlewood (2011), and Yu (2011), assert that using the mother tongue may prevent the L2 learning process; therefore, students should only be exposed to the L2.

Numerous studies have explored students' attitudes and perceptions about L1 use in EFL classrooms in different settings around the world (e.g., Nazary, 2008; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Akulova, 2019; Nanda, 2021; Hasrina, Aziz, & Fitriani, 2018)**.** As for the Afghan context, there has been no research directly addressing the students' attitudes toward L1 use in EFL classrooms. A closer look at the literature shows there are two studies conducted in Afghanistan that have only focused on teachers' perceptions and views on the use of L1 in English classes, but they did not take into account students' views and attitudes. Quite recently, Orfan (2023) examined the instructors' perceptions of their first language and how it is used in EFL classes in Afghanistan. It was found that lecturers have positive attitudes toward English-medium instruction, believing it prepares students for careers in national and international markets. The other is a case study on the functions of code-switching in EFL classrooms carried out by Narasuman, Wali, and Sadry (2019) at Balkh and Kandahar Universities in

Afghanistan. The findings indicated that Afghan EFL lecturers held positive perceptions toward code-switching, but they were not in favor of doing it in the classroom.

Furthermore, to the researchers' knowledge, no study has been done until now to study students' attitudes regarding the use of Farsi in EFL classes at the Ghor Institute of Higher Education. So, this study represents the first to investigate the problem and seeks to fill the research gap by drawing on data from students in the English Department. Investigating the attitudes of students toward using L1 (Farsi) can provide valuable insights into their needs and preferences. This study also contributes to the existing literature and long-standing debate regarding the use of L1 in English classrooms by providing a new perspective on a context that has received no attention in previous studies. It further offers curriculum developers, administrators, and policymakers a better understanding of students' needs and attitudes toward using their mother tongue in English classes. The results can help teachers understand why students use their L1 in English as a foreign language class and guide them on how to make effective use of their L1 in such classrooms. More specifically, the study sets out to address the questions below:

1. What are students' attitudes about the use of Farsi (L1) in EFL classrooms at Ghor Institute of Higher Education?
2. Why do students use Farsi in their EFL classes?
3. What are students' attitudes about the use of Farsi by their teachers in the classroom and their reasons behind using it?

II.　　REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Arguments for and Against Using L1 in EFL classrooms

There has been a long-running debate on whether L1 should be banned or permitted in EFL classes for decades. In fact, it has been one of the most controversial issues in the field of second language acquisition, which has raised several supporting and opposing arguments. That is, some scholars claim that the mother tongue (L1) should be eliminated from EFL classrooms, while others argue that using it is an advantage in foreign language teaching. There are two contrasting approaches regarding the use of L1 in EFL, which are known as the monolingual and bilingual approaches. Those supporting the former approach believe that L1 has no role in L2 classrooms, as it might deprive learners of valuable L2 input and hinder progress (Blooth, Azman, & Ismail, 2014; Ellis, 1985; Bouangeune, 2009). McMillan and Rivers (2011) also refer to the monolingual view (the L2-only approach) and believe that the use of L1 can reduce the amount of exposure to a foreign language and restrict input as well as learners' production of L2, but the advocates of L1 use in EFL classrooms consider it a great advantage; they believe that using L1 helps learners learn L2 more effectively (Salah & Farrah, 2012; Al-Nofaie, 2010, Silvani; 2014; Cook, 2010; Tang, 2002). The supporters of L1 also argue that the extensive use of L2 can harm learners' cognitive and affective developments. Instead, teachers should encourage the use of the mother tongue (L1) as a beneficial tool and know its cognitive and pedological functions in EFL classrooms (Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins, 2007; Antón & DiCamilla, 1998). Similarly, Auerbach (1993) criticized the L2-only approach, arguing that this movement had historical and ideological roots. Further, she says, "Contrary to the claim that use of the L1 will slow the transition to and impede the development of thinking in English, numerous accounts suggest that it may facilitate this process"(p. 8). According to Cook (2001), "The first language can be a useful element in creating authentic L2 users rather than something to be shunned at all costs" (p. 402). Nation (1990) also asserts that degradation of native language has a detrimental psychological impact on learners. Furthermore, some scholars state that eliminating L1 in an EFL classroom is seemingly impossible (Alshehri, 2017). Overall, some scholars believe that using L1 in EFL classes aids the possible task and argue that the mother tongue has a positive effect on the foreign language learning process, whereas others claim that the use of it in foreign language classrooms impedes the learning process.

2.2 Teaching Methods and Approaches that Support and Ban L1

It is noted that educators have also employed different teaching methods in EFL classrooms over the course of history to aid the learning process. The first method is known as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which was dominant in foreign language classrooms from the 1840s to the 1940s (Richards & Rodgers, 2003. It is a method in which the mother tongue is extremely important for students to learn the target language). In fact, students' success is measured depending on how well they can translate from one language into another. Another method that was developed in opposition to GTM is known as the "Direct Method". This is the one that attempts to ban the use of the mother tongue during classroom interactions—peer interactions and teacher-learner interactions (Galali & Cinkar, 2017). According to Richards and Rodgers (2003), when the direct method emerged as a response to GTM around the 1900s, the use of L1 was forbidden as the medium of instruction. Yenice (2018) also adds that the direct and audio-lingual methods completely ban the use of L1 in

EFL classrooms, while others, such as the natural approach and the communicative language teaching method, do not forbid it completely but limit its use. He also found that teachers use L1 for different purposes; for example, some use it to give instructions around the class, but others use it either to explain or teach grammatical structure as well as vocabulary. Besides, some other scholars, such as Levine (2003), also argue that using L1 can help learners make progress in the target language (TL), so it is strongly advised in L2 classes as it draws the learner's attention and persuades them to take part in the classroom. Generally speaking, L1 advocates (e.g., grammar translation) are in favor of using L1, while its opponents fear that it might hinder learners from learning the new language (e.g., the direct method and the audio-lingual method). Moreover, some other methods (e.g., the natural approach and the communicative language teaching method) encourage the limited use of L1.

2.3 Previous Related Literature

Due to the ongoing debate surrounding the use of the mother tongue (L1), there have been numerous studies to investigate students' attitudes and perceptions regarding the use of L1 in EFL classrooms. The following are some of the relevant previous studies that addressed the issue:

Kocaman and Aslan (2018) investigated students' perceptions of using L1 in EFL classes at Private Anatolian High School. The researchers collected the data by administering a questionnaire to 96 students. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents from different proficiency levels had a positive view of the use of L1 and believed that it was an inevitable part of their EFL class. Anggrahini (2019) carried out a similar study on the perceptions of students toward using L1 (Bahasa Indonesia) in EFL classrooms. The researcher applied both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research questions and used a questionnaire and interviews to gather the relevant data. The findings showed that most of the respondents were in favor of using L1 in the EFL classroom for various reasons, such as understanding the meaning of new words, grammar, new materials, and the teacher's instruction, as well as feeling secure. A small percentage, however, had a tendency toward the maximum use of English to improve their language skills and did not want to rely on their native tongue. Shariati (2019) also explored students' attitudes about using L1 in the EFL classroom at a private institute in Iran. The study included 50 male and female language learners aged between 15 and 35 with three different levels of language proficiency: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Data was collected using a questionnaire to discover the learners' attitudes toward the use of L1 in EFL classes. The findings revealed a negative correlation between participants' proficiency level and their attitudes about using L1. Lower-level students had positive attitudes about the use of L1 when learning English, while higher-level students had negative attitudes. The findings of this study are also in line with those of Al-Nofaie (2010), who, in a study, reported that both students and teachers had positive attitudes toward using L1 in EFL classrooms. The teachers stressed that L1 is important in their classrooms; nevertheless, they said that it should not be used untimely and excessively as it may impede learning English. Likewise, Afzal (2013), in a study about using the first language in EFL classrooms as a way of scaffolding for the students and teachers to learn and teach English, found that students have a positive attitude toward utilizing their L1 in classrooms, believing that Persian (the mother tongue) plays a supportive role in the EFL classes.

On the contrary, in a study conducted by Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011) regarding students' and teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward the use of L1 in EFL classes in two pre-university English classes in Iran, the findings indicated that participants (low and high levels) were against the use of their native language, (Persian) in EFL classrooms because if it was employed excessively, it could demotivate learners. Instead, they preferred maximum exposure to English (TL). In general, the results showed that students were strongly in favor of being exposed to the target language and rejected excessive use of L1 in foreign language classrooms. In line with Mahmoudi and Amirkhiz (2011), Nazary (2008) investigated the attitudes and perceptions of students about the use of L1 in L2 classrooms in an Iranian university. The participants were 85 male and female students taking English there, and the data were collected through a questionnaire. The study found that learners were unwilling to use their L1 in English classrooms and believed that doing so would reduce the amount of time they spent learning English. Similarly, Almohaimeed and Almurshed (2019) investigated the attitudes and perceptions of foreign language learners toward L1 (in this case Arabic) use in L2 classes at a Saudi university. The participants were 60 female students with different language proficiency levels taking preparatory courses. The results revealed that students at advanced levels show a negative attitude toward using L1 in EFL classes, but elementary and intermediate students support the judicious use of their mother tongue. A closer look at previous studies reveals that they have exclusively investigated the attitudes of students toward using L1 in other settings, but no studies have addressed this issue under question in the present context-Afghanistan.

III.   METHOD OF RESEARCH

3.1 Setting and Participants

The participants consisted of 150 English major undergraduates who were all learning English as a foreign language at the Ghor Institute of Higher Education, Afghanistan. The participants were all male students and were all chosen purposefully from the English Department; their ages ranged between 20 and 30.

3.2 Instruments

A questionnaire was used for collecting data. The purpose of this research tool was to obtain information regarding students' attitudes concerning the use of Farsi in ELF classrooms, as well as other research questions of the study. The questionnaire was adapted from Alsied (2018). To suit the purpose of the study, the author made a few minor changes to the questionnaire related to the names of the languages addressed in the research: Farsi as L1 and English as L2. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part sought the participants' demographic details, e.g., age and gender. The second part comprised 22 items, which were divided into three sections. The first section (7 items) aimed to seek students' attitudes toward the use of Farsi in the EFL classroom, and the second section (7 items) focused on students' reasons for using Farsi in the EFL classroom. The third section's (8 items) purpose was to seek the students' attitudes toward their teacher's use of Farsi as well as the reasons behind using it in English classrooms. The participants were asked to choose their responses from a four-point Likert scale (SA = strongly agree; A = agree; SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree).

3.3 Data Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was shared with the research committee of the institute and a team of English teachers before being distributed to the participants to proofread the items and get their views on its improvement. A few modifications were made based on their feedback and comments. Furthermore, to measure the reliability of the data collection tool, the researcher conducted a polite test with 22 randomly chosen participants at the English Department of the Ghor Institute of Higher Education. The researcher conducted the data analysis of a pilot study using SPSS version 26. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was measured to be 767. Thus, the data collection tool used in the study was reliable, and it was appropriate and acceptable to collect data from the participants.

3.4 Data Collection and Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researchers asked the dean of the Faculty of Education at the Ghor Institute of Higher Education for permission and coordination. After getting their agreement, the researcher organized four sessions with the students of four classes to meet them and collect data. The researchers also asked the lecturers of the English Department for cooperation with the data collection for the study. Each lecturer devoted time for them to conduct their study with their students because the research happened during their regular teaching hours. After giving a brief orientation for around five minutes about the purpose, nature, and advantages of the study and its findings to the teachers and students in the classes, particularly in the Afghan EFL context, the questionnaire was handed out to the participants on four consecutive days. The students were also assured that their participation was optional and that their personal details would be fully kept confidential, as they would be used only for academic and research purposes. Before answering each item of the questionnaire, they were asked to read the instructions and then rate their level of agreement with each statement. The study was conducted in their classrooms. It is to be noted that the questionnaire was administered in English because all the participants were English majors. The researcher was present to help and give them verbal instructions in Farsi if they had questions related to the topic or if any part of the questionnaire seemed unclear. It took them around 30-35 minutes to fill out the questionnaires and return them successfully.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire were initially computed and transferred to an Excel document to find out the frequencies of each item. The data were then interpreted qualitatively, and the results were cross-checked by two teachers for reliability.

IV.   FINDINGS

Figures 1, 2, and 3 display the frequency of choices of the items related to the first, second, and third research questions (SA= Strongly agree; A= agree; SD= strongly disagree; D= disagree).
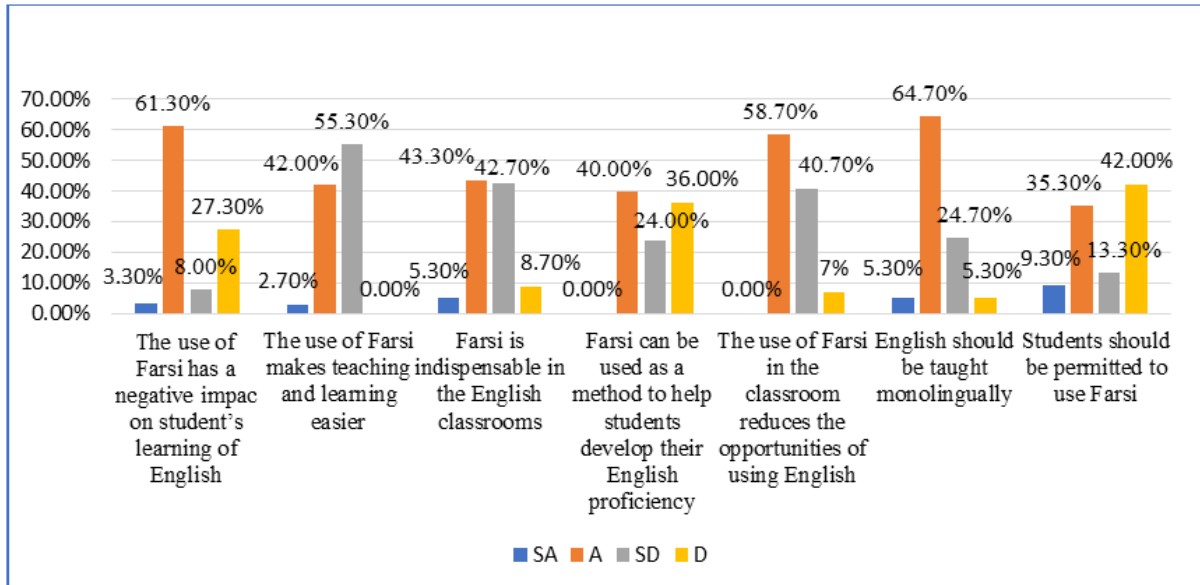
Figure 1. Students' attitudes regarding the use of Farsi in EFL classrooms

In response to the first question, over half of the respondents (64.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that the use of Farsi negatively affects students' learning of English. Besides, 60% of the total population disagreed with the use of Farsi as a method to help students improve their English proficiency, followed by 58.7%, who felt that using L1 in the EFL classroom diminishes the opportunity for students to speak English in their classes. ore importantly, the data in Fig. 2 indicates that the highest percentage (70%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that English should be taught monolingually, demonstrating a strong support for the use of English as the only language of instruction. Nevertheless, as for the use of Farsi in the English classrooms, 44.7% of the participants agreed that it makes learning and teaching easier, and nearly half (48.6%) of them thought that the mother tongue was necessary in English classrooms. Similarly, less than half (44.6%) of the respondents accepted that they should be allowed to use L1 in the EFL classroom. The overall analysis revealed that the participants attitudes were mainly positive toward using Farsi in English classes and thus supported its inclusion to a certain extent. However, a great majority of the respondents preferred monolingual English classes.
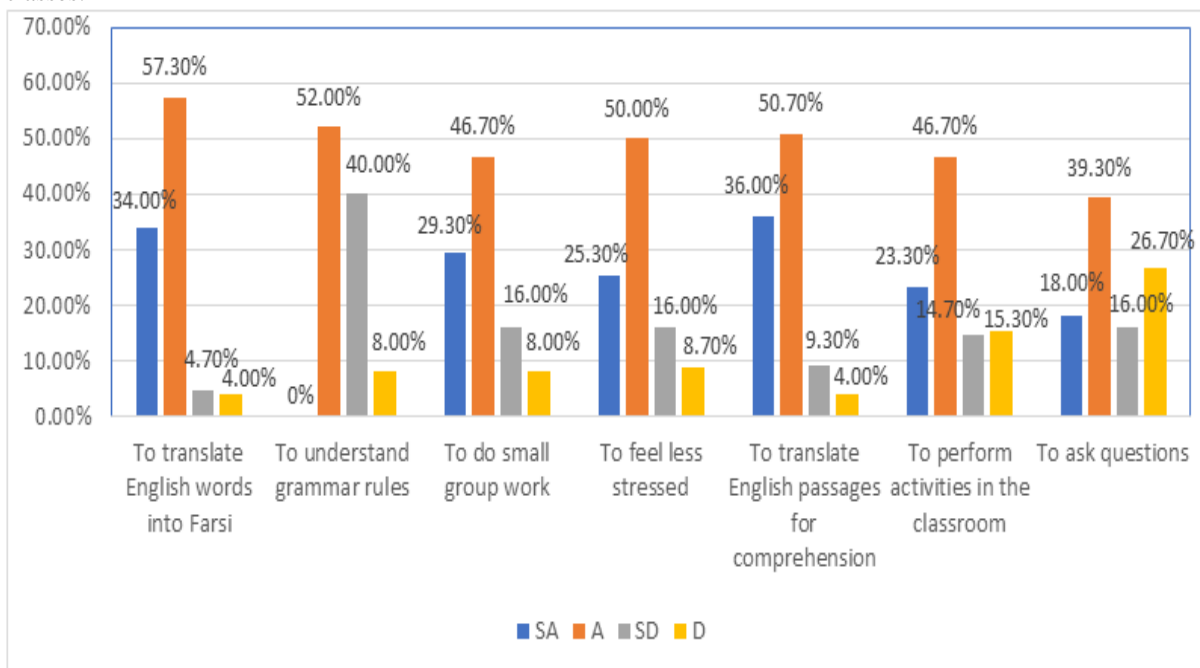

Figure 2. Students' reasons behind using Farsi in the EFL English classrooms

As for the second question, students' reasons behind using Farsi in the EFL classroom, Fig. 2 indicates that students used their mother tongue for various reasons. The highest percentage (91.3%) of the respondents agreed that they use Farsi to translate English words into Farsi, and 86.7% of them agreed that they use it to translate English passages to comprehend them better. Likewise, of the total of 150 individuals who participated in the study, 76% agreed or strongly agreed with the concept of using their L1 when conducting small group work, and 75.6% turned to it to feel less stressed. Also, 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they use Farsi to perform classroom activities, but less than half of them did not agree with it. Additionally, 52.0% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they use Farsi to understand grammar, and 57.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they employ it to ask questions in class. In general, it is apparent from Fig. 2 that the vast majority of respondents in the study used Farsi mainly to translate English words into Farsi and translate passages for better understanding, i.e., the two items account for the most common reasons students at the Ghor Institute of Higher Education agreed to use Farsi in English classes.
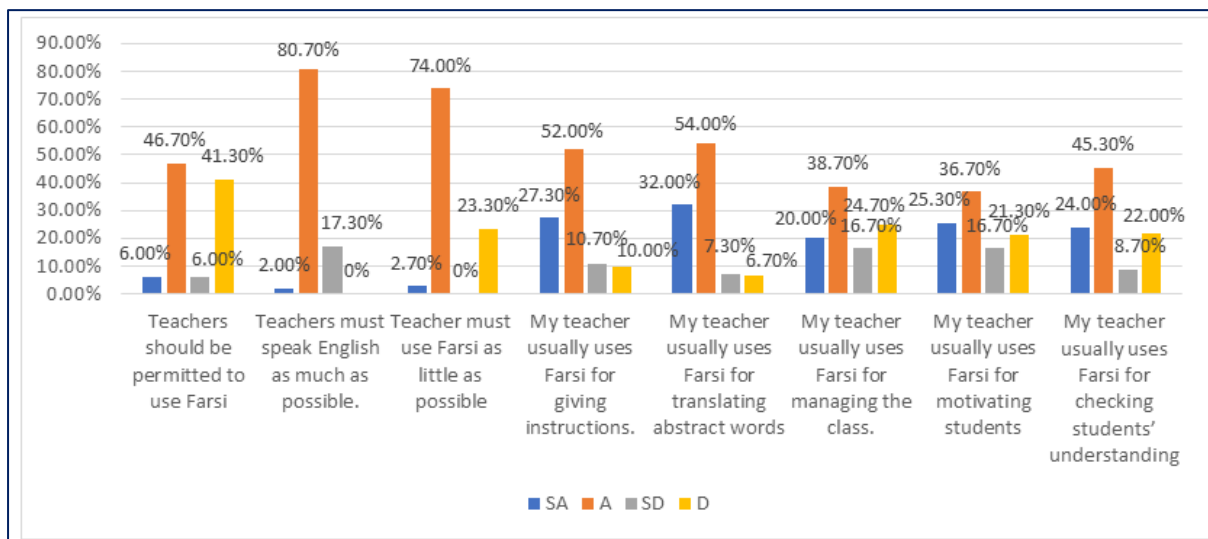

Figure 3. Students' attitudes regarding the use of Farsi by their teachers and reasons for its use

With respect to the third question, it was found that students have varying attitudes toward the use of Farsi by their teachers' and reasons for using it. The results showed that 82.7% of the respondents agreed that their teachers should speak English as much as possible in the EFL classroom, and 76.7% of them also agreed that their teachers use Farsi as little as possible. Nevertheless, 52.7% of participants supported the idea that teachers should be permitted to use their mother tongue in EFL classes, but less than half (47.3%) of them opposed it. Also, as seen in Fig. 3, the majority of the participants stated that their teachers mainly used Farsi to translate abstract words (86%), give instructions (79.3%), check students' understanding (69.3%), motivate students (62%), and manage the class (58.7%), respectively.

V.   DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to find out the students' attitudes toward the use of L1 (in this case, Farsi) in EFL classes. The results of the study suggested that students at the Ghor Institute for Higher Education have positive attitudes toward the use of Farsi in their EFL classrooms to some degree; however, a great number of them believed that English should remain the main medium of communication in the classroom. The results of this study may be in line with Manara's (2007), who found that the majority of Indonesian students agreed on the maximum use of English, but L1 was still used in various situations in their classroom practice. Likewise, a study by Al-Nofaie (2010) indicated that Saudi Arabian students had primarily positive attitudes concerning the use of English, but they also supported the use of Arabic in certain circumstances and for particular purposes. Moreover, the results of the research by Hashemi and Sabet (2013) also support the findings of the current study. The researchers investigated the perceptions of Iranian EFL students and lecturers toward using Persian in general English classes at a university in Iran. The findings of the study showed that the Iranian students believed in the effectiveness of Persian in general English classes as well as the comfort it could bring to such classes. As Auerbach (1993) said, "Its use reduces anxiety, enhances the effective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates the incorporation of learners' life experiences, and allows for learner-centered curriculum development" (p. 29). It stands in contrast with Nazary's (2008) study, which

revealed a large number of Iranian students at Tehran University were hesitant to use Persian in their English classrooms on the grounds that using L1 would decrease their exposure to English. The current study, however, discovered that participants at Ghor Institute of Higher Education were in favor of using L1 to some degree and did not exclude it totally from the EFL classroom; to put it another way, the findings are consistent with the results of Kocaman and Aslan (2018), Shariati (2019), and Anggrahini (2019), in which students seemed willing to use their first language in the EFL classroom.

As for the students' reasons for using L1 in EFL classrooms, the study found that participants mainly employed it to translate words from English into Farsi and translate English passages from English into Farsi to better comprehend them. Moreover, Farsi was also used for a range of other purposes, such as to carry out small group work, do activities, feel less stressed, understand grammar, and ask questions. It seems these findings are also in parallel with Alsied (2016), which showed that students used Arabic in EFL classes for the same purposes. Moreover, the results of this study also concur with those of Blooth, Azman, and Ismail (2014), who found that students at a university in Yemen employed Arabic for translating new words and providing some explanation. Similarly, Imani and Farahian (2016) discovered in a study that Persian (L1) was used mainly to understand some grammar, new words, instructions, and difficult concepts, as well as to carry out group work and check for comprehension. Moreover, the results obtained are aligned with those obtained in Afzal's (2013) study, in which Iranian students used their mother tongues to understand grammar points, define lexicons, and translate words.

Regarding the students' attitudes toward teachers' use of Farsi and their reasons behind using it, the study found that a large proportion of the students were in favor of teachers' use of English to the fullest extent in classrooms, with a tendency to use more English but limiting the use of L1. The results of this study are similar to Al-Shidhani's (2009) study, which reported that a great majority (over 90%) of Omani students believed that their teacher should employ English as much as possible. However, the results are in contrast with Kabir's (2020) study, in which the majority of students had an inclination toward the teacher's use of L1 in the class rather than limiting it. The current study also indicated that their teachers used Farsi basically to translate abstract words, give instructions, and check students' understanding. In agreement with this study, Salah and Farrah's (2012) study showed that Palestinian students believed that their teachers used Arabic mainly to translate abstract words as well as check students' understanding. The results of the study also seem to agree with Hanáková and Metruk's (2017) study in a few areas, such as giving instructions, checking student understanding, and understanding specific vocabulary.

VI.   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' attitudes toward using Farsi in the context of the Ghor Institute of Higher Education. In light of the findings of the study, three conclusions can be drawn. First, students had positive attitudes regarding the use of Farsi in their EFL classrooms to some degree, but a significant fraction preferred to use English exclusively. Second, the results of the study also revealed that a high percentage of students used L1 for certain reasons in EFL classrooms. For instance, it was primarily used to translate words from English into Farsi and to translate passages from English into Farsi to better comprehend them. Third, a great number of students participating in the study also felt that their teachers should speak English extensively in EFL classes, and it was also found that their teachers used L1 for translating abstract words, providing instructions, and checking students' understanding. Generally speaking, the findings imply that students were supportive of using L1 rather than eliminating it; however, they favored L2 the most.

It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide a baseline for further research on students' attitudes toward L1 in EFL classrooms in the future and assist teacher trainers, policymakers, and curriculum developers in understanding students' needs and attitudes concerning their use of L1 in foreign language classrooms. The findings may also assist teachers understand when their students tend to use their first language. Moreover, understanding the students' attitudes toward using L1 can lead to a more effective, enjoyable, and engaging learning environment for students of English as a foreign language in the context of Afghanistan.

An important implication of this study is that EFL teachers need to be aware of students' attitudes and preferences about language use in the EFL classroom. Some students may prefer using L1 to support their learning, while others may prefer English as the only language of instruction. Thus, teachers can adjust their teaching accordingly.

6.1 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

There are some limitations to this study that have to be taken into account in future studies. First, the sample only consisted of male students' due to certain restrictions. Second, it was conducted in a specific context with students majoring in English at an English department in a public institute, which cannot be generalized to other settings, so similar studies are suggested with students of other majors as well as at other universities, high schools, and private English educational centers. Third, it focused entirely on the students'

attitudes; therefore, further studies are also required to explore teachers or compare both teachers' and students' views and voices about the issue at hand. Moreover, other data collection instruments, such as interviews, observations, or triangulation, can also be applied to collect data from EFL students to get a deeper understanding of their insights about the use of Farsi in EFL classes. Finally, this study could encourage further related studies to investigate students' attitudes toward their L1, considering their proficiency levels as well as other variables.

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