

An Exploratory Study of Own-language Use in Tunisian English Language Classrooms: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study explores the practices and attitudes of Tunisian English language teachers regarding the use of Arabic (own-language) in English language classes. Data were collected by means of an online self-report questionnaire, created through Google Form and posted to a Facebook group controlled by non-profit professional organization for Tunisian teachers of English. The online self-report questionnaire was completed by 40 in-service Tunisian English language teachers. Results revealed that: a) most of the Tunisian participant teachers used Arabic in English language lessons with varying degrees of frequency and for a variety of functions, b) the majority of the teachers held unfavorable attitudes towards using Arabic in English language classes, c) the great majority of the surveyed teachers encouraged their students to use English in EL classes (e.g. by responding in English to students who talked to them in Arabic), and d) some of the surveyed teachers' attitudes towards the use of Arabic in the English language classrooms had a significant impact on the frequency of their Arabic-language use in such contexts.

Keywords

English language teachers, Arabic, own-language use, English language classrooms, Tunisia

Introduction

The employment of an English-only policy in English language (EL) classes dominated English language teaching from the late nineteenth century until the late twentieth century (Hall & Cook, 2012). Since the Reform Movement of the 1880s, English-only policy has been cherished and adopted by several English language teaching methods such as the audiolingual and audiovisual methods, the communicative method, and the Silent Way (V. Cook, 1999). These methods have stipulated the exclusive use of English (V. Cook, 1999). Nevertheless, learner's own-language has continued to be used in many English language lessons around the world (Hall & Cook, 2012).

Because own-language use is likely to occur in classrooms where teachers and students share the same own-language (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; V. Cook, 1999), it can present a concern for teachers in English language classrooms like these, especially novices. On the one hand, English language teachers should maximize their use of English in the classroom (Nation, 2003). On the other hand, in so doing they may encounter comprehension problems as well as difficulties in classroom management, so they opt for using their own-language to solve them (Franklin, 1990; Turnbull, 2001). Such teachers may do this naturally, that is, without having the intention of employing, or even being aware of the existence of, teaching methods that

support own-language use in English language lessons (V. Cook; 1999, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In the last few years, a number of studies have empirically approached the question of using the own-language in the teaching of English language (e.g. Atkinson, 1987; Kharmā & Hajjaj, 1989; Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Yavuz, 2012; Hall & Cook, 2013; Alsied, 2018; and Scheffler & Domińska, 2018; Sharma, 2006; Alshammari, 2011; AlKhamisi, 2019; Macaro, 1995; and Erk, 2017). The empirical evidence from these studies suggests that teaching through English only in English classes where the teachers and students share the own-language is impossible. As Atkinson (1993a) puts it, teaching 100 percent in English has no theoretical evidence. Similarly, Sharma (2006) states teaching 100 percent in English is not only unfeasibility but also undesirable. Ellis (1994) goes far as to argue that any theory of new-language acquisition that ignores the learners' own-language is incomplete.

Tunisian English language classes, the focus of this research, are no different from those examined in the aforementioned studies in that they are contexts where teachers and students share the same own-language, in this case Arabic. In such contexts, there is a great temptation on the part of teachers to use the own-language to save time (Turnbull, 2001). To date own-language use in Tunisian English language classrooms has been unexplored and consequently this study provides a significant contribution to the literature.

Context and Rationale of the Study

English language teaching has steadily improved in Tunisia since the country's independence in 1956. (Daoud, 1996; Battenburg, 1997). Today English is taught to 6th graders in primary schools, to 7th, 8th and 9th graders in preparatory schools, and to 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders in secondary schools (Boukadi & Troudi, 2017). English is also taught in over 50 tertiary-level institutions, including faculties of business, engineering, economics, medicine, and science (Battenburg, 1996; Daoud, 1996). Furthermore, English is taught outside tertiary education by many institutions belonging to the business, banking, and airline sectors (Daoud, 1996, 2001). Moreover, there has been an increase in the number of English language centers which teach English to young and adult learners (Boukadi & Troudi, 2017).

It seems that there has been no exploration of teachers' attitudes and practices regarding the use of Arabic (own-language) in Tunisian EL classes. Indeed, no research on language use in Tunisian classrooms has been conducted to date (Daoud, 2001), and EL classrooms are no exception. To my knowledge there has been no study of Tunisian EL teachers' attitudes concerning the use of Arabic in English language teaching. As an attempt to fill this gap in the literature, this study set to explore the practices and attitudes of Tunisian EL teachers regarding the use of Arabic in EL lessons through answering the following research questions:

1. What are the Tunisian EL teachers' reported uses of Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms?
2. What are the Tunisian EL teachers' reported attitudes towards the use of Arabic in Tunisian EL classes?
3. Is Tunisian EL teachers' use of Arabic in Tunisian EL lessons influenced by their attitudes towards such uses?

Literature Review

In this section, we will be looking at the literature on the practices and attitudes of English language teachers regarding own-language use in English lessons. It will start with some

notes concerning terminology. Then it will turn to review a number of studies of own-language use in English language teaching. After that, it will move to discussing whether or not own-language should be used in EL classrooms.

Terminology

The first point in this sub-section has to do with the distinction between the concepts ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language). It seems that these two concepts are no longer distinguishable from one another. According to Hall and Cook (2012) and H. D. Brown (2000), the spread of English as an international language has blurred the lines between the terms EFL and ESL (for further details, see H. D. Brown, 2000, p.193). To avoid confusion, the neutral term English language (from now on EL) will be used throughout this paper to describe the classes/lessons/classrooms where English is taught as well as the teachers of English.

The second point is related to the terms used to designate the language(s) being used in EL classes. These normally include English, the language being taught, and the language that can be used in its teaching and is part of the students' linguistic repertoire. In this context, several terms have been used to refer to English such as "second language", "foreign language", and "target language" (Hall & Cook; 2012, 2013). Likewise, the language that students already know and can be used in the teaching of English has been termed "mother tongue", "first language", and "native language" (Hall & Cook; 2012, 2013). While acknowledging the currency of these terms, Hall and Cook (2012, 2013) have criticized them and adopted the terms "new language" and "own-language", suggested by G. Cook (2010), to refer to English and the language that can assist in its teaching, respectively. Following Hall and Cook (2012, 2013), the term "own-language" will be used in this article to refer to Arabic language.

Research on own-language use in EL classes

Literature points to three types of studies as far as own-language use in EL classes is concerned: (a) studies that have dealt only with own-language uses in EL lessons, (b) studies of teachers' attitudes towards own-language use in English-language teaching, and (c) studies which have explored both practices and attitudes regarding the use of own-language in EL classrooms.

Studies of own-language uses in EL classes

Evidence shows that the own-language has been used in EL lessons to the extent that teachers often underestimate or under-report the amount of their own-language use (Hall & Cook, 2012). Not only this, there has been prevalent use of own-language within EL classrooms even in context where it is overtly discouraged (Hall & Cook, 2013). Such prevalence engenders the question: *how do teachers use the own-language in English classes?* Indeed, literature on own-language use in ELT reveals that teachers use the own-language for a variety of functions (e.g. Atkinson, 1987; Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Yavuz, 2012; Alsied, 2018; and Scheffler & Domińska, 2018). To begin with, during an experiment of teaching English to Spanish monolingual classes for ten months Atkinson (1987) found that Spanish (student's own-language) was useful for fulfilling the following functions: eliciting language (all levels), checking comprehension (all levels), giving instructions (early levels), discussions of classroom methodology (early levels), presentation and reinforcement of language (mainly early levels), checking for sense, testing, and development of useful learning strategies.

Results of Copland and Neokleous's (2011) interviews with four Cypriot EL teachers at two after-school Cypriot private language institutions showed that Greek was used for eleven functions: (1) organizing the classroom, (2) explaining/revising language skills and systems, (3) giving instructions, (4) asking and answering questions, (5) reprimanding, (6) joking, (7) praising, (8) translating, (9) marking, (10) providing hints, and (11) giving opinions. In a similar way, Yavuz (2012) interviewed twelve Turkish EL teachers, working at twelve different primary schools in Balıkesir (Turkey), about the use of Turkish in their classes. They gave different reasons for using Turkish in EL lessons: a) to control large classes, b) to prepare for examinations, c) to give some instructions, d) to compensate for the lack of English teaching materials, e) to motivate learners, f) students' loss of self-confidence, and g) to check comprehension, (h) to explain the activity, and (i) to teach abstract vocabulary. Similarly, Alsied's (2018) interviews with five Libyan EL teachers at the English department of Sebha University, indicated that these teachers used Arabic in EL lessons for a variety of purposes: to make their students understand, to illustrate something, to emphasize information, to give instructions, to explain a new term or a concept, to draw students' attention, and to give the meaning of new and unfamiliar words. Likewise, the interviews which Scheffler and Domińska (2018) conducted with 20 Polish EL teachers, working in different preschools in a large city in Poland, revealed that Polish was used in EL classes mainly for ensuring the children's well-being, managing the classroom, and teaching the language.

Believing that studies based only on self-report or observation are unable of providing an accurate depiction of teacher's actual own-language use, Littlewood and Yu (2011) provided a third perspective on own-language use in EL lessons in Hong Kong and Mainland China by means of asking 50 second-year tertiary students to recall their teachers use of the own-language (Cantonese or Putonghua) in junior-secondary-school EL classrooms. Results revealed that the main reasons for teachers' use of own-language were: establishing social relationships with students, explaining grammar and vocabulary, and maintaining discipline.

Studies of teachers' attitudes towards own-language use in EL lessons

Many studies investigated the attitudes of EL teachers towards own-language use in EL classes in a variety of contexts (e.g. Alsied, 2018; Sharma, 2006; Alshammari, 2011; AlKhamisi, 2019; Macaro, 1995; and Erk, 2017). To start with, Alsied's (2018) interviews with five Libyan EL teachers, working at the English department of Sebha University, focused on both their use of Arabic in EL lessons and their attitudes towards such use. Results revealed that all the teachers shared the belief that while English should be the dominant language in the class room, Arabic could be allowed sometimes provided it would not be overused. Results also revealed that of the five teachers only three thought that the use of Arabic made students more motivated and relaxed.

In the Nepalese context, Sharma (2006) explored the attitudes of 20 EL teachers towards the use of Nepali in EL classes at a high school in Chitwan. The majority of participant teachers (64%) thought that Nepali should be used in EL lessons. More precisely, they thoughts that it was necessary to use Nepali to explain new vocabulary items (42%), to explain grammar (39%), to practice the use of some phrases and express (36%), and to explain difficult concepts or ideas (35%). Sharma (2006) concluded that the prohibition of own-language use in EL classes is likely to deprive the students of some opportunities to learn English better.

Turning to the Saudi Arabian context, Alshammari (2011) studied the use of Arabic in EL classrooms among 13 EL teachers at two Saudi technical colleges. As the study results

indicated, the teachers believed that Arabic should be used in English lessons to clarify difficult concepts or ideas (51%), to explain new vocabulary words (25.7%), to explain grammar points (16%), and to give instructions (7.3%). Results also indicated teachers' belief that Arabic was necessary in the classroom because it saved time (60.1%), increased comprehension (24%), and made the learning process more effective (15.9%).

As a contribution to research on attitudes towards own-language use in Omani EL lessons, AlKhamisi (2019) examined the attitudes of 50 EL teachers from Oman, Egypt, and Tunisia, working in eight schools in four Omani governorates. As results revealed, while only 28.5 percent of these teachers thought that Arabic should not be used in EL classes, the majority (57.2%) were in favor of Arabic language use. Besides, the study found that about three-fifths of teachers (61.3%) thought that Arabic language use could help students learn English much better contrasted to 20.4 per cent who did not think so. In addition, results indicated that 32.6 percent of participant teachers believed that Arabic language use saved time, whereas 44.9 percent disagreed with this view.

Focusing on English language teaching in Italy, Macaro (1995) explored the attitudes of 21 Italian EL teachers to own-language use in Italian EL classrooms. The study showed three main teacher's attitudes: (1) most of the participant teachers thought that Italian was most effective in establishing social relationships with pupils, (2) only two-third of teachers believed that good EL teachers did not necessarily use English almost exclusively, and (3) a significant number of participants felt that Italian could sometimes be used to evaluate or comment on pupils' performance.

What Erk (2017) studied were the attitudes of 440 Croatian EL teachers towards the use of Croatian in EL lessons. The study indicated that the majority of teachers agreed on the role of Croatian in their students' better understanding of grammar (68%), in their teaching efficiency (60.4%), and in their students' better understanding of vocabulary (53.9%). It also indicated that less than two-fifths of participants believed that Croatian language use contributed to raising students' confidence and comfort during EL classes (39.1%) and to better time management (34%).

It appears from the aforementioned studies that teachers vary in their attitudes towards own-language use in EL classrooms. As Hall and Cook (2013) put it, "not all teachers hold the same attitudes to own-language use" (p.10).

Studies of teachers' practices and attitudes regarding own-language use in EL lessons

Studies which explore both own-language uses and attitudes towards such uses are scarce compared to the other two types. Among these one can mention Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) and Hall and Cook (2013).

As part of a study to examine Arabic language use in EL classes at the elementary and the lower intermediate levels in Kuwait, Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) surveyed 185 EL teachers. They found that most of the participant teachers used Arabic for explaining vocabulary (71%), grammar (66%), and difficult questions (63%). Nevertheless, a smaller number of surveyed teachers reported using Arabic for explaining instructions, reading the attendance list, advising late-comers, conducting part of the discussion, assigning homework, explaining reading passages, giving everyday instructions, explaining lesson procedures, and greetings and leave-taking. Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) examined not only teachers' use of Arabic in these classes but also their attitudes towards such practice. Indeed, the majority of the

surveyed 185 teachers believed that Arabic facilitated the English language teaching and learning, whereas only 12 per cent did not share this belief. A small minority of teachers (7%) considered Arabic language use to be obstacle to the teaching and learning of English language.

To provide large-scale empirical evidence about the role of own-language use in English language teaching, Hall and Cook (2013) surveyed 2,785 EL teachers working in 111 countries. They focused on teachers' uses of own-language in EL classrooms as well as their attitudes towards own-language use in the teaching of English language. Teachers in the survey reported frequent use of own-language to explain unclear meanings (72%), to explain vocabulary (61.5%), to explain grammar (58.1%), to develop rapport and a good classroom atmosphere (53.2%), and to maintain discipline (50.4%). They also reported using the own-language less frequently to give instructions (43.2%), to correct spoken errors (36.6%), to give feedback on written work (41%), and to test and assess learners (28.6%). Results regarding teachers' attitudes towards own-language use in English language teaching showed that the majority of the surveyed teachers held the following beliefs: (a) English should be the main language used in the classroom (90.1%), (b) own-language should be allowed only at certain points of the lesson (73.5%), (c) own-language use should be excluded or limited (61.4%), and (d) own-language use helped learners express their cultural and linguistic identity more easily (56.7%).

To use or not to use own-language use in EL classrooms?

Based on the literature reviewed above, one can classify the functions of own-language use in EL classrooms into two categories: language-related and learner-related functions. Language-related functions have to do with the teaching of English. Learner-related functions, on the other hand, are associated with the learner. Table 2 shows examples of these functions:

Table 1

Types of Own-language-use Functions in EL Lessons

Language-related functions	Learner-related functions
Explaining vocabulary	Maintaining discipline (e.g. reprimanding)
Explaining grammar	Giving instructions
Checking comprehension	Developing a good atmosphere (e.g. joking)
Explaining tasks	Establishing social relationships
Explaining texts	Praising
Correcting learners' mistakes	Greeting and leave-taking
Carrying out discussions	Calling the register
Giving clues	Raising students' self-confidence
Testing	Promoting students' enthusiasm for leaning
Compensating for the lack of teaching materials	

The fact that own-language is used in EL lessons for a variety of functions raises the following question: *should teachers use own-language in English language teaching?* Using or ignoring own-language in English language teaching has been a matter of debate. As Sharma (2006) states, "the issue of whether language teachers should use the students' first language in their second/foreign language classroom has always been a controversial one" (p. 80). Some academics and researchers such as Krashen (1981 and 1982) have rejected own-

language use in English language teaching, believing that its use prevents the acquisition of the English language. Krashen (1981) believes that “the second language classroom might be a very good place for second language acquisition” (pp.115-116). Nation (2003) proposed 11 strategies to maximize the use of English in EL lessons. Own-language exclusion from EL classes has also been adopted by such teaching methods as the Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Method (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

On the contrary, other academics and researchers have argued for the use of own-language in English language classrooms (see Atkinson, 1987; Franklin, 1990; Harbord, 1992; Atkinson, 1993; Ellis, 1994; Turnbull, 2001; Llurda, 2005; V. Cook, 2001; Sharma, 2006; Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Levine, 2012; Kerr, 2015; Kerr, 2019). For example, Ellis (1994) goes far as to argue that any theory of new-language acquisition that ignores the learners’ own-language is incomplete. Besides, there are many teaching methods that allow the use of own-language though with varying degrees, e.g. the Silent Way, the Grammar-translation Method, Desuggestopedia, Communicative Language Learning, Total Physical Response, and Communicative Language Teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). V. Cook (1999 and 2001) mentioned other own-language-use supporting methods, namely the New Concurrent Method and Dodson’s Bilingual Method.

According to Phillipson (1992), five tenets underlie the employment of an “English-only” strategy in EL lessons: (1) English is the best taught monolingual; (2) the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker; (3) that the earlier English is taught, the better the result; (4) the more English is taught, the better the result; and (5) if other languages are used too much, standards of English will drop. Phillipson (1992) examined these tenets then debunked them, arguing “that each tenet is false, and that each can be redesignated as a fallacy” (p.185).

In line with Phillipson (1992), V. Cook (2001) questioned three arguments advanced against own-language use in EL classes: the analogy of own-language acquisition with new language learning, language compartmentalization, and the aim of maximizing students’ exposure to the new language. He contended that they do not justify the exclusion of own-language from EL lessons and argued that that EL teachers can use the own-language for the following six functions: (1) conveying and checking meaning of words and sentences, (2) explaining grammar, (3) organizing tasks, (4) testing, (5) maintaining discipline, and (6) getting contact with individual students. Likewise, Kerr (2015, 2019) identified four arguments that are most frequently advanced against own-language use in EL classrooms and debunked them. Kerr (2015) believed that these and other arguments “have been extensively and comprehensively countered by both researchers and methodologists” (p.3). Table 1 illustrates these arguments and the counter-arguments proposed by Kerr (2019).

Table 2

Arguments and Counter-arguments for the Exclusion of Own-language from English Classes, based on Kerr (2019)

Arguments	Counter-arguments
1. Translation is less important than the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and, in any case, is not a useful skill for most learners to acquire.	1. In addition to its importance in a globalized and multilingual world, translation has rich educational potential as a learning, diagnostic and testing tool.
2. Time spent using own language is time lost using English.	2. Teachers often use the own-language for reasons of economy and small amounts of it

may make more time available for English.

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|---|--|
| 3. Learners need to learn to think in English and own-language use discourages them from doing so. | 3. The exclusion of the own-language from English lessons does not accelerate the development of this fluency. |
| 4. Own language use encourages the false belief that there is a word-for-word equivalence between languages, and therefore leads to language interference problems. | 4. Language transfer occurs in all learning situations, so it is unlikely that it is the consequence of own-language use in the classroom. |
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Once an EL teachers accepts the use of own-language in EL classes, an important question arises, namely, *how much own-language should be used in such classrooms?* Turnbull (2001) believes that “the SL [second language] or FL [foreign language] teachers who spoke the TL [new language] during less than 25% of class time were relying far too much on the L1 [own-language] and were depriving their students of valuable TL [new language] input” (p.536). Therefore, the teacher should provide as much exposure to the English language as possible because the class may be the students’ only opportunity to use it (Turnbull, 2001; Llurda, 2005). However, this does not imply a total exclusion of own-language (Turnbull, 2001; Llurda, 2005) neither does it imply its overuse (Atkinson, 1987; Turnbull, 2001; Llurda, 2005). According to Atkinson (1987, p.246), the overuse of own-language may lead to the following problems:

- The teacher and/or the students begin to feel that they have not ‘really’ understood any item of language until it has been translated.
- The teacher and/or the students fail to observe distinctions between equivalence of form, semantic equivalence, and pragmatic features, and thus oversimplify to the point of using crude and inaccurate translation.
- Students speak to the teacher in the mother tongue as a matter of course, even when they are quite capable of expressing what they mean.
- Students fail to realize that during many activities in the classroom it is crucial that they use only English. Nation (2003, p.6) suggests a number of strategies that may help English-language teachers maximize the use of English, hence minimize own-language use:
 - Choose manageable tasks that are within the learners' proficiency.
 - Prepare learners for tasks by pre-teaching the language items and skills needed.
 - Use staged and graded tasks that bring learners up to the level required.
 - Get learners to pretend to be English speakers.
 - Make the L2 an unavoidable part of the task. Retelling activities, strip stories, completion activities, and role plays all require the use of the L2.
 - Repeat tasks to make them easier.
 - Inform learners of the learning goals of each task so that they can see how using the L2 will help them achieve a clear short term learning goal.
 - Discuss with the learners the value of using the L2 in class.
 - Get learners to discuss the reasons why they avoid using the L2 and get them to suggest solutions to encourage L2 use.

- Set up a monitoring system to remind learners to use the L2. In group work speaking tasks this can involve giving one learner in each group the role of reminding others to use the L2.
- Use non-threatening tasks. Learners can choose their own groups, the teacher can stay out of the groups, allow learners to prepare well for the tasks, don't use tasks that put learners in embarrassing situations, and choose interesting, non-threatening topics.

It seems that using or not using the own-language in EL classrooms is not an easy decision but rather a difficult choice. As Sharma (2006) points out, “the issue of whether language teachers should use the students’ first language [own-language] in their second/ foreign language classroom has always been a controversial one” (p. 80).

Methodology

Data collection method

Data were collected by means of an online self-report questionnaire, created through Google Form and posted in a Facebook group controlled by non-profit professional organization for Tunisian teachers of English. The questionnaire was made up of 19 items grouped under three sections: teachers’ use of Arabic in EL lessons (4 questions), teachers’ attitudes towards the use of Arabic in EL classes (10 questions), and teachers’ background (5 questions) (see Appendix I). It was inspired by the reviewed literature. For instance, statements 7 to 10 corresponded to arguments 1, 2, 3, and 4 often advanced against the use of own-language in the teaching of English language (see Table 1 above).

The online questionnaire combined closed-ended and open-ended options in the same multi-choice question. Actually, all the Likert scale items belonging to the section about teachers’ attitudes towards the use of Arabic in EL lessons included not only the categories “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neutral”, “disagree”, “strongly disagree”, “don’t know”, “not applicable”, “no response” but also the category “other”. Similarly, all the four multi-choice questions making up the section about teachers’ practices regarding the use of Arabic in EL classrooms included the category “other”. The reason behind this was to eliminate the risk that “if none of the items apply, the respondent may have the option to leave the question unanswered” (Dörnyei, 2003, p.43).

Self-report questionnaires as a research tool are commonly used in applied linguistics. As Dörnyei (2003) states, “the main attraction of questionnaires is their unprecedented efficiency in terms of (a) researcher time, (b) researcher effort, and (c) financial resources” (p.9). The online self-completed questionnaire is no different. One reason for employing it as a data collection technique in this study is its economy in terms of time, cost, and effort. Another reason is that it “can yield three types of data about the respondent: factual, behavioral, and attitudinal” (Dörnyei, 2003, p.8).

Initially, the questionnaire was piloted to 10 EL teachers who were not included in the sample. It included the open concluding question “we have tried to make this questionnaire as comprehensive as possible but you may feel that there are things we have missed out. Please write what you think below” (Gillham, 2000, pp. 34-35). The aim behind piloting the questionnaire was to “*pretest* it to determine its effectiveness and its problems” (emphasis in original) (T. Baker, 1994, p. 182).

In this study, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, or simply Cronbach’s Alpha, was used to measure the internal consistency reliability of the online questionnaire. Cronbach’s Alpha is

defined by Dornyei (2007) as “a figure ranging between 0 and +1 (although in extreme cases – for example with very small samples and with items that measure different things – it can also be negative)” (p. 206). As illustrated in Table 3, the questionnaire reliability was calculated as .716. This value can be described as good or relatively high (Taber, 2018, p.1278), which indicates the reliability of the online questionnaire.

Table 3
Reliability Statistics of the Questionnaire Items

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.716	19

Participants

The online survey questionnaire was completed by a random sample of 40 in-service Tunisian EL teachers representing different genders, educational qualifications, educational sectors, teaching experiences, and types of educational institutions. What is innovative in this study is its inclusion of language-center EL teachers and EF teachers in vocational training centers. Table 4 shows the distribution of the participant EL teachers.

Table 4
The Distribution of Participant Teachers according to Five Background Variables

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	29	72.5
	Male	11	27.5
Educational qualification	BA	12	30
	MA	19	47.5
	PhD	9	22.5
Educational sector	Primary education	8	20
	Secondary education	11	27.5
	Tertiary education	13	32.5
	Vocational training	3	7.5
	Language training	5	12.5
Years of teaching experience	1 year or less	4	10
	More than 1 year up to 3 years	2	5
	More than 3 years up to 5 years	2	5
	More than 5 years up to 10 years	4	10
	More than 10 years	28	70
Type of educational institution	State-owned	32	80
	Privately owned	8	20

Data analysis

The analysis of the data engendered by the questionnaire items involved data screening and data analysis and presentation. Data screening had to do with making certain that (a) responses are legible and understandable, (b) responses are complete, and (c) all of the necessary information, such as participant's gender, educational qualification, educational sector, years of teaching experience, and type of educational institution, had been included.

Statistical package SPSS 20 was used for data analysis. Precisely, it was used for both descriptive statistics (e.g. percentages, frequencies, and cross-tabulations) and inferential statistics (Kruskal-Wallis H test). It should be noted that the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was chosen for the examination of the relationships between variables because data were not normally distributed (Pallant, 2001; Dörnyei, 2007; Hinton et al., 2014). Indeed, the p values of a set of figures which have a normal distribution are higher than .05 (Garth, 2008), but as Table 5 illustrates, the p values of all the figures under the Sig. column are below .05.

Table 5
SPSS Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Gender	.453	40	.001	.559	40	.001
Educational sector	.190	40	.001	.889	40	.001
Educational qualification	.241	40	.001	.809	40	.001
Years of teaching experience	.410	40	.001	.603	40	.001
Type of educational institution	.489	40	.001	.491	40	.001
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Results and Discussion

Tunisian EL teachers' reported uses of Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms

In this section, we will be looking at the results related to Tunisian teachers' practices concerning the use of Arabic in EL lessons. As Table 6 shows, most of the survey respondents indicated the use of Arabic in teaching English language with varying degrees of frequency. Interestingly, almost three-fifths of the participant teachers reported that they rarely used Arabic in EL classes, while nearly one-third of them indicated that they used it sometimes. However, a tiny minority of the sample reported that they used it often, and an equal proportion indicated that they never used it, in English language teaching. Note that no teacher reported using Arabic always in EL classrooms. These findings are different from those obtained by Erk (2017) in her study which, like the current one, involved teachers working in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Indeed, more than half of the teachers (53 %) in her study reported using the own-language (Croatian) sometimes, 27.3 percent revealed using it often, 16.4 percent indicated using it rarely, and only 2.7 percent reported using it always. This difference may be due to difference in the sample size: 440 participants in Erk's (2017) study contrasted to only 40 participants in the current study. Otherwise, it

suggests that the frequency of own-language use in EL lessons may vary according to the context.

Table 6

Teachers' Reported Frequency of Arabic Language Use in EL Classrooms

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	3	7.5
Rarely	23	57.5
Sometimes	11	27.5
Often	3	7.5
Always	0	0
Total	40	100

A series of Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference in the frequency of Arabic language use in terms of the background variables: gender, educational qualification, years of teaching experience, educational sector, and type of educational institution. Results of these tests revealed that the survey respondents did not significantly differ in the frequency of Arabic language use according to gender ($x^2 = .154$, $df = 1$, $p = .695 > .05$), educational qualification ($x^2 = 5.882$, $df = 2$, $p = .053 > .05$), years of teaching experience ($x^2 = 3.197$, $df = 4$, $p = .525 > .05$), educational sector ($x^2 = 5.228$, $df = 4$, $p = .265 > .05$), and type of educational institution ($x^2 = .001$, $df = 1$, $p = .970 > .05$).

It is obvious from the results presented above that the background variables had no significant impact on the frequency of own-language use in Tunisian EL classes. Not all of these results are consistent with the findings of earlier studies. To begin with, the nonsignificant influence of gender on own-language use in this study is in accordance with what Salah and Farrah (2012) reported, whereas Samadi's (2011) study found that male teachers used more own-language than female teachers. Secondly, unlike this study where there is no effect of teachers' educational qualifications on their own-language use, Samadi (2011) reported that female MA-holding teachers used the own-language more than female BA-holding teachers. Thirdly, as it is the case in the current study, the studies of Salah and Farrah (2012) and Alsied (2018) showed that the years of teaching experience had nonsignificant effect on own-language use. Fourthly, the current study indicated that the influence the type of educational institution (state-owned vs. privately owned) had on teachers own-language use in EL classrooms was not significant, a finding that is in line with what Hall and Cook (2013) discovered. Indeed, they found that state-institution teachers used the learner's own-language more frequently than teachers in the private sector. Finally, unlike the present study, Erk (2017) found that the participant teachers' use of own-language was affected by the educational sector (primary, secondary or tertiary education). In fact, she discovered that teachers working in tertiary education used students' own-language less than teachers working in secondary education, and the latter in turn used it less frequently than those working in primary education.

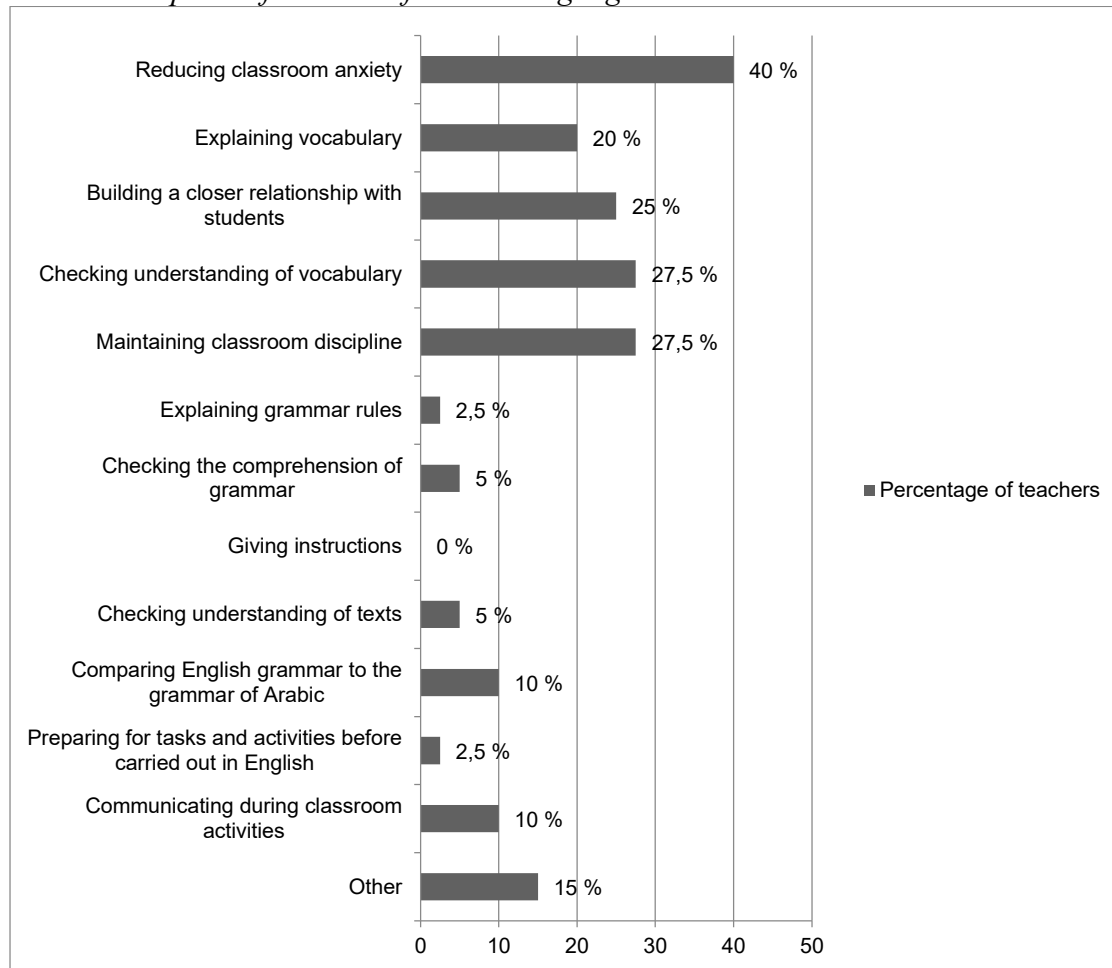
Turning to the functions of using Arabic in EL classes, Figure 1 illustrates that the reduction of classroom anxiety had the highest percentage of Arabic language use among the participant teachers. The check of the understanding of vocabulary, the maintenance of classroom discipline, the build of a closer relationship with students, and the explanation of vocabulary had the next highest percentages of teachers' use of Arabic. One-tenth of the participant teachers indicated that they used Arabic for comparing English grammar to the grammar of Arabic and an equal proportion reported that they used it for communicating

during classroom activities. The checking of grammar comprehension, the checking of reading comprehension, the preparation for tasks and activities before being carried out in English, and the explanation of grammar rules were the functions for which Arabic was used the least by the survey respondents. What is noticeable here is that none of the teachers reported using Arabic for giving instructions, which is inconsistent with the findings of other studies (e.g., Atkinson, 1987; Copland & Neokleous, 2011; Yavuz, 2012; Hall & Cook, 2013).

In addition to the 12 functions highlighted in the online questionnaire (and listed in Figure 1), about one-sixth of the respondents specified other ways in which they made use of Arabic in EL lessons, namely kidding, translation of abstract words, talking about successful experiences, explaining an extremely important lesson content, and comparing English and Arabic proverbs, idiomatic expressions and metaphors. Like the current study, several studies indicated a variety of own-language-use functions in EL classrooms (e.g. Atkinson (1987; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Yafuz, 2012; Hall & Cook, 2013; Alsied, 2018; Scheffler & Domińska, 2018; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Copland & Neokleous 2011).

Figure 1

Teachers' reported functions of Arabic language use in EL lessons



Another point, the great majority of the surveyed teachers (88.10 %) reported that they responded in English to students who talked to them in Arabic, whereas none indicated responding in Arabic. One-tenth of the participants noted other ways to deal with the situation such as “I try to help him/ her say the same idea in English”, “It depends on the

situation”, “I tell them I don’t understand the language. They end up reformulating in English”, and “I speak to him/her in both languages”. Teachers’ response in English to students who spoke to them in Arabic implied a covert encouragement to use English. Indeed, the great majority of participant teachers (90 %) indicated that they encouraged their students to use English in EL classrooms.

The study results have revealed that most of Tunisian participant teachers: a) used Arabic in EL lessons with varying degrees of frequency and for a variety of both language-related and learner-related functions and b) encouraged their students to use English in EL lessons, for instance, by responding in English to students who talked to them in Arabic.

Tunisian EL teachers’ attitudes towards the use of Arabic in Tunisian EL classes

In the second section of the online questionnaire, participant teachers were asked to indicate their attitudes towards the use of Arabic in EL classrooms by rating 10 statements on a nine-point Likert scale. Table 8 below displays the results of participants’ responses to these statements. As illustrated in Table 7, only a quarter of the participant teachers agreed with the statement “The use of Arabic is relevant to Tunisian EL classrooms, where teachers and learners do share the Arabic language”, while nearly three-fifths of the sample disagreed with it. This finding is in accordance with what Alkhamisi (2019) reported. Indeed, he found that 56 percent of the teachers thought that using the Arabic language was not significant in EL classes in Oman, whereas 32 percent agreed that it was significant.

The vast majority of the surveyed teachers believed that “Tunisian EL teachers should avoid using Arabic except as a last resort”, which reveals these teachers’ belief that English should be the dominant language in EL lessons. This finding is in accordance with the results of some studies (e.g., Macaro, 1995; Alshammari, 2011; Mahmutoglu & Kicir, 2013; Hall & Cook, 2013; Alsied, 2018). However, it is not in line with the results of other studies (e.g., Zacharias, 2003; Kovačić & Kirinić, 2011; Machaal, 2012). To be specific, Zacharias (2003) reported that most participant teachers agreed that own-language use have beneficial effect on English language teaching. Similarly, four-fifths of the teachers (80 %) whom Kovačić and Kirinić (2011) surveyed supported the use of Croatian in EL classrooms. Likewise, most of the teachers (92 %) who participated in Machaal’s (2012) study favored the use of Arabic in EL lessons

Table 7

Respondents’ Attitudes towards the Use of Arabic in EL Classrooms (in %)

	(S)A	N	(S)D	D/K	N/A	N/R	Other	Total
1. Using Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms saves time.	27.5	12.5	50	0	7.5	0	2.5	100
2. The use of Arabic is relevant to Tunisian EL classrooms, where teachers and learners do share the Arabic language.	25	10.5	57.5	5	2.5	0	0	100
3. Tunisian EL teachers should avoid using Arabic except as a last resort.	72.5	2.5	22.5	2.5	0	0	0	100
4. The overuse of Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms is disadvantageous to English language learning.	90	5	5	0	0	0	0	100

5. I feel guilty about using Arabic in EL classrooms.	40	10	32.5	0	17.5	0	0	100
6. I feel obliged to use Arabic in EL classrooms.	35	5	50	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	100
7. Learners in Tunisian EL classrooms need to learn to think in English.	97.5	0	0	0	2.5	0	0	100
8. The use of Arabic in English language teaching will exacerbate the problems of first language interference.	60	10.0	17.5	0	2.5	0	2.5	100
9. Time spent using Arabic is time that would be better spent using English.	70	7.5	20	0	2.5	0	0	100
10. English-Arabic translation is a valueless skill to practice in Tunisian EL classrooms.	57.5	5	33.5	2.5	0	2.5	0	100

(S)A = (strongly) agree, A = agree; N = neutral; (S)D = strongly disagree; D/K = don't know; N/A = not applicable; N/R = no response

Two-fifths of the participant teachers (strongly) agreed with the statement “I feel guilty about using Arabic in EL classrooms”. Such result is almost the same as the one reported by Hall & Cook (2013): only 36 per cent of the teachers favored the statement “I feel guilty if languages other than English are used in the classroom” (p. 41). Similarly, only 35 percent (strongly) agreed with the statement “I feel obliged to use Arabic in EL classrooms”.

While half of the survey respondents (strongly) disagreed with the statement “using Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms saves time”, about one-third of them (strongly) agreed with it. These results are consistent with the findings of earlier studies. For example, Alkhamisi (2019) found that the percentage of the participant teachers who did not believe that using Arabic in EL classrooms could save time (44.9%) was higher than that of the ones who agreed with this belief (32.6%). Likewise, Shuchi and Islam (2016) reported that a small percentage of Bangladeshi and Saudi participant teachers, 23 percent and 28 percent respectively, thought that own-language use in EL classes was time-saving. Similarly, Erk's (2017) study showed that only 34 percent of the surveyed teachers agreed that Croatian language use contributed to better time management. All these results do not support the contention of Atkinson (1987), Harbord (1992), and Turnbull (2001) that the use of own-language in English language teaching is time- saving.

Most of the survey respondents thought that “the overuse of Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms is disadvantageous to English language learning”, whereas a tiny minority did not share this view. This finding suggests that most of the surveyed teachers recognized the danger of overusing the own-language, in this case Arabic, in EL lessons. These results not only corroborate the findings of earlier studies (Anh, 2012; Shah, 2017; Alsied, 2018; Al-Nofaie, 2020) but also support Atkinson's (1987, 1993b) contention that excessive use of own- language has to be avoided and Turnbull's (2001) caution against the own-language overuse.

As it is shown in Table 7 above, the majority of the surveyed teachers expressed favorable attitudes towards statements 7, 8, 9, and 10, which, as mentioned earlier, correspond to the

arguments advanced by the opponents of own-language use in English language teaching (see 4.1). What this shows is that these teachers agree with the arguments of the own-language-use opponents.

It is worth mentioning that one female teacher selected the option “Other” and specified “Maybe using rarely Arabic or French for A1 to A2 learners to explain vocabulary”, “Rarely”, and “It depends on the use and learners' level” as responses to the statements (1), (6), and (8), respectively.

In order to detect any significant difference in teachers' responses to the ten statements, listed in Table 7 above, according to the background variables (gender, educational qualification, educational sector, years of teaching experience, and type of educational institution) five Kruskal-Wallis H tests were performed. Results have indicated a nonsignificant difference in attitudes towards own-language use in terms of educational qualification, a finding which is in line with what Paker and Karaağaç (2015) reported. Educational sector, too, did not affect teachers' attitudes towards own-language use, which is inconsistent with Erk's (2017) study. Like educational qualification and educational sector, years of teaching experience had no impact on attitudes towards own-language use. While this is in accordance with the findings of Paker and Karaağaç's (2015) and Erk's (2017) studies, it does not corroborate the result of Hall & Cook's (2013) study which indicated that more experienced teachers held more positive attitudes towards own-language use than less experienced ones.

Unlike educational qualification, educational sector, and years of teaching experience, gender appeared to have an effect on some of teachers' attitudes. In fact, results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test of gender's influence on attitudes to Arabic language use indicated that male teachers and female teachers differed significantly in their responses to the statement “I feel guilty about using Arabic in EL classrooms” ($x^2 = 5.836$, $df = 1$, $p = .016 < .05$). The cross-tabulation between the two variables revealed that the proportion of male teachers who agreed with the statement “I feel guilty about using Arabic in EL classrooms” (54,6%) was greater than the proportion of female teachers (34,4%). Conversely, the percentage of female teachers who disagreed with it (37,9%) was higher than the percentage of male teachers (18,2%).

As it was the case with gender, results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test of the influence of type of educational institution on attitudes towards own-language use showed a significant difference between teachers in the public sector and private-institution teachers in their responses to the statement “I feel guilty about using Arabic in EL classrooms” ($x^2 = 4.896$, $df = 1$, $p = .027 < .05$). The cross-tabulation between these two variables revealed that teachers in the private sector favored the statement “I feel guilty about using Arabic in EL classrooms” (75%) far more than state-institution teachers (31,3%), a result which is in line with Hall & Cook's (2013) study. In contrast, 34,3 percent of the latter disapproved of (i.e. strongly disagreed or disagreed with) the statement compared to 25 percent of the former.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test also indicated that the type of educational institution had an effect on teachers' responses to the statement “I feel obliged to use Arabic in EL classrooms” ($x^2 = 5.232$, $df = 1$, $p = .022 < .05$). When the two variables were cross-tabulated, it was revealed that 75 percent of teachers in private institutions agreed with the statement “I feel obliged to use Arabic in EL classrooms” contrasted with 25 percent of teachers in the public sector. Contrarily, while 59,4 percent of state-institution teachers

disagreed with the statement, only 12.5 percent of teachers in the private sector disagreed with it.

In brief, the study results indicated that the majority of Tunisian teachers held unfavorable attitudes towards using Arabic in EL classes. This is inconsistent with some previous studies which revealed that teachers held positive attitudes regarding the use of own-language in English language teaching (e.g. Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Sharma, 2006; Elmetwally, 2012; Shah, 2017; Diaf, 2017; Erk, 2017; Alsied, 2018; Suhayati, 2018).

Influence of attitudes on practices

In the preceding sections we have learnt about the attitudes and practices of the participant Tunisian EL teachers regarding the use of Arabic in EL classes. An important question arises here: Do teachers' attitudes towards own-language use bear influence on the frequency of own-language use? To find out if such influence existed, a series of the Kruskal-Wallis H test were performed. Table 8 illustrates the results of these tests. From this table we can see that only three attitudes bear a statistically significant influence on the frequency of Arabic language use in EL classrooms. Such influence can be understood in the sense that the respondents who believe that Tunisian EL teachers should avoid the use of Arabic in EL classes and that the use of Arabic is disadvantageous to EL learning and feel obliged to use Arabic in such context are more likely to avoid (not use it at all) or minimize (make limited use) the use of Arabic in the teaching of English language.

Table 8

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis H test of Influence of Attitudes on Practices

		<i>Dependent variable</i>	
		Frequency of Arabic-language use in EL classes	
		Chi-square	Asymptotic significance
<i>Independent variables</i>	Attitudes towards Arabic-language use in EL classrooms		
	1. Using Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms saves time.	7.706	.103
	2. The use of Arabic is relevant to Tunisian EL classrooms, where teachers and learners do share the Arabic language.	2.512	.473
	3. <i>Tunisian EL teachers should avoid using Arabic except as a last resort.</i>	9.777	.044
	4. <i>The overuse of Arabic in Tunisian EL classrooms is disadvantageous to English language learning.</i>	12.462	.014
	5. I feel guilty about using Arabic in EL classrooms.	3.843	.428
	6. <i>I feel obliged to use Arabic in EL classrooms.</i>	10.444	.034
	7. Learners in Tunisian EL classrooms need to learn to think in English.	2.666	.103
	8. The use of Arabic in English language teaching will exacerbate the problems of first language interference.	6.692	.082
9. Time spent using Arabic is time that	8.338	.080	

would be better spent using English.		
10. English-Arabic translation is a valueless skill to practice in Tunisian EL classrooms.	8.771	.067

p value is significant at .05 level.

The investigation of the impact of the attitudes statements about using the own-language in the teaching of the English language on the frequency of own-language use in EL lessons among the surveyed Tunisian EL adds a further dimension to the current study. Such dimension was not considered in the studies which explored both teachers' attitudes towards, and their use of, the own-language in EL classrooms, such as those conducted by Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) and Hall and Cook (2013).

Conclusion

To conclude, this study has five main findings. Firstly, most of the surveyed Tunisian EL teachers reported the use of Arabic (own-language) in their EL lessons, albeit with varying degrees of frequency (rarely/sometimes/often), for a variety of functions. Secondly, the great majority of them reported encouraging their students to use English in EL classes, including responding in English to students who talked to them in Arabic. Thirdly, the majority of the participant teachers appeared to disfavor own-language use in English language teaching. Fourthly, while background variables (i.e. gender, educational qualification, educational sector, teaching experience, and type of educational institution) had no significant effect on the frequency of teachers' own-language use, some of them (namely, gender and type of educational institution) appeared to influence some of their attitudes. Finally, only some of teachers' attitudes towards Arabic-language use in English language teaching appeared to have a significant impact on how often they actually used Arabic in EL classes.

The significance of the current study emanates from its investigation into the practices and attitudes of Tunisian EL teachers regarding Arabic- own-language use in Tunisian EL classrooms, a topic that has been under-researched in the Tunisian context. In so doing, it has contributed not only to research on own- language use in English language teaching in Tunisia but also to the literature on own-language use in EL classes in general.

Nevertheless, this study had two main limitations. The first limitation is that it was based on only one data collection technique, namely the self-report online-questionnaire. Even though this technique was economic in terms of cost, effort, and time, it might not give a complete understanding of the topic under study because it "gives us insight *not* into *actual* behavior but only into *reported* behavior" (Pauwels, 2016, p. 62) (emphasis in original). Second has to do with its being a small-scale study, which makes it impossible to generalize the findings to all Tunisian EL teachers currently in-service in Tunisia.

Therefore, further studies are needed to provide a full understanding of own-language use in Tunisian EL classes. Such studies should involve both teachers and students and employ not only survey questionnaires but also classroom observations.

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