

**[The Impact of Mother Tongue Interference on Second Language Acquisition: A Case Study of EFL Learners]**  
**أثر تداخل اللغة الأم على اكتساب اللغة الثانية: دراسة حالة لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية**

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### ملخص البحث:

يُعدّ تأثير اللغة الأم في اكتساب اللغة الثانية من الموضوعات المحورية في دراسات اللسانيات التطبيقية، حيث يُنظر إليه بوصفه ظاهرة متعددة الأبعاد تنشأ عن التفاعل بين الأنظمة اللغوية والمعرفية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل تصورات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في المرحلة المتقدمة في ليبيا بشأن تأثير لغتهم الأم في أدائهم اللغوي، وذلك من خلال اعتماد منهج كمي تحليلي يقوم على تحويل الخبرات اللغوية الذاتية إلى متغيرات قابلة للقياس. تم جمع البيانات باستخدام استبانة منظمة تعتمد مقياس ليكرت لقياس تصورات المتعلمين عبر خمس مجالات رئيسية: المجال المعرفي، والتركيبي، والصوتي، والدلالي، والإملائي. أظهرت النتائج وجود أنماط إدراكية متكررة تشير إلى وعي ملحوظ بتأثير اللغة الأم، خاصة في مجالي الترجمة الذهنية والتراكيب الاصطلاحية، في حين اتسمت بعض الجوانب التركيبية بدرجة أعلى من التباين بين المشاركين. تشير النتائج إلى أن المتعلمين يدركون تأثير اللغة الأم بوصفه ظاهرة شاملة تمس عمليات التفكير الداخلي وبناء المعنى والاختيارات التركيبية، إلا أن الاستنتاجات تظل محصورة في إطار التصورات الذاتية للمشاركين، ولا تمثل قياساً مباشراً للأداء اللغوي الفعلي أو دليلاً على استقرار بنية لغوية بينية. تسهم هذه الدراسة

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في تقديم قراءة كمية دقيقة لكيفية تفسير المتعلمين لدور لغتهم الأم في تعلم اللغة الثانية، مع التأكيد على أهمية الضبط المنهجي عند تحليل ظاهرة التأثير اللغوي استناداً إلى بيانات إدراكية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التأثير اللغوي المتبادل، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تأثير اللغة الأم، الانتقال اللغوي الإدراكي، المنهج الكمي التحليلي.

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### Abstract

Mother tongue interference remains a central concern in second language acquisition research, as it reflects the interaction between linguistic structures and cognitive processing systems. The present study investigates advanced Libyan EFL learners' perceptions of first-language influence through a quantitative analytical framework that transforms subjective linguistic experiences into measurable variables. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire designed to examine perceived interference across five domains: cognitive, syntactic, phonological, semantic, and orthographic. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed recurring perceptual patterns, with the strongest levels of reported influence observed in mental translation and idiomatic interpretation. Phonological and orthographic domains also showed substantial agreement, whereas syntactic features exhibited greater variability among participants. The findings indicate that participants report perceiving mother tongue interference as a multidimensional phenomenon affecting

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internal processing, structural organization, and meaning construction. However, given the instrument's perception-based nature, the conclusions are limited to reported experiences rather than to performance-based linguistic measurement or verified interlanguage stabilization. By quantifying learners' self-perceived cross-linguistic influence within an advanced EFL context, the study provides empirically grounded insight into how learners interpret the role of their first language in second language use, while maintaining methodological caution regarding the scope of inference.

**Keywords:** Cross-Linguistic Influence, EFL Learners, Mother Tongue Interference, Perceived Linguistic Transfer, Quantitative Analytical Approach.

## 1. Introduction

Mother tongue interference remains a central issue in second language acquisition, particularly in contexts where structural and conceptual divergence between the native and target languages is substantial. Earlier work on cross-linguistic influence established that prior linguistic knowledge shapes second language performance in systematic ways rather than producing random error (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Subsequent research refined this understanding by emphasizing that interference reflects structured interaction between linguistic systems rather than isolated deviation (Ellis, 2015).

In foreign language environments, the first language continues to function as a cognitive resource during second language processing. Cook (2016) argues that bilingual competence involves interaction between linguistic systems, making complete separation unrealistic. This interaction may manifest as mental translation, syntactic transfer, or phonological substitution, particularly when automatic processing in the second language remains incomplete.

Recent scholarship further conceptualizes cross-linguistic influence as a measurable phenomenon embedded in bilingual cognition. Odlin (2021) highlights that transfer effects should be examined as observable patterns rather than anecdotal classroom observations. Psycholinguistic research supports this perspective, demonstrating that lexical access in bilingual

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speakers often involves simultaneous activation of linguistic representations (Kroll, Dussias, & Bajo, 2022). Otwinowska (2024) extends this argument by showing that co-activation persists even when learners attempt to operate exclusively in the second language.

Empirical investigations in Arab EFL contexts confirm the persistence of L1-mediated patterns. Al-Khresheh (2020) reports systematic transfer in tense usage and clause construction, while Al-Sobhi and Preece (2021) provide quantitative evidence of article-related interference. Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2022) further identify recurring syntactic patterns influenced by Arabic grammatical structures in academic writing. Phonological influence has also been documented; Mahmoud (2022) reports consistent sound substitution patterns attributable to phonemic differences between Arabic and English.

More recent studies highlight the pedagogical and cognitive dimensions of L1 reliance. Tan (2024) illustrates how translanguaging during writing processes may reinforce L1-based structuring strategies. Smagul (2024) provides quantitative evidence that classroom reliance on translation practices can shape learner processing habits. Similarly, Al-Jarf (2023) demonstrates that excessive dependence on mental translation negatively affects fluency and coherence.

Research on stabilization further reinforces the persistence of interference. Han (2022) argues that recurring non-target patterns may reflect interlanguage stabilization rather than temporary developmental stages. Montrul (2020) likewise demonstrates that structural influence from the first language can remain observable even among advanced bilingual speakers. These findings collectively underscore the importance of systematically measuring interference patterns rather than treating them as isolated phenomena.

Despite the breadth of international research, limited multidimensional quantitative analysis has been conducted within advanced Libyan EFL contexts. Existing studies often focus on single domains such as writing or pronunciation (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013) without integrating cognitive, structural, and phonological dimensions simultaneously. The

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present study addresses this gap by adopting a quantitative analytical framework to examine mother tongue interference across multiple linguistic domains within a homogeneous learner population.

## **1.1. Research Objectives**

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To quantitatively determine the extent of reported mother tongue interference in English language use
2. To identify the most affected linguistic domains by L1 interference, specifically cognitive processing (mental translation), phonological production, syntactic structure, and semantic usage, based on learners' reported experiences.
3. To examine the role of mental translation as a dominant cognitive factor of interpret mother tongue interference as a systematic interlanguage strategy, and to evaluate its impact on learners' ability to think directly and spontaneously in English.
4. To interpret learners' perceptions of mother tongue interference within a systematic cross-linguistic framework.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

In alignment with the objectives of the study, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does mother tongue interference continue to influence English language use among fifth-semester EFL learners despite prolonged formal instruction?
2. Which linguistic domains demonstrate the highest levels of reported L1 influence, and how consistently are these domains reflected across the learner sample?
3. How does reliance on mental translation relate to learners' reported difficulty in thinking directly in English?
4. To what extent do learners perceive recurring interference patterns as persistent features of their language experience rather than incidental difficulties?

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Foundations of Cross-Linguistic Influence**

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Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) conceptualize cross-linguistic influence as a multidimensional phenomenon operating beyond surface-level grammatical interference. Their framework emphasizes that transfer may occur at structural, semantic, and conceptual levels, shaping how learners construct meaning and organize discourse. Rather than interpreting interference as isolated performance errors, they position it as a systematic interaction between linguistic systems. This perspective provides a foundational understanding that interference reflects structured cognitive processing rather than random deviation.

Ellis (2015) further develops this interpretation by situating transfer within broader models of second language development. He argues that acquisition involves gradual restructuring processes in which prior linguistic knowledge continuously influences emerging representations. From this viewpoint, interference is not an anomaly but a predictable stage in the reorganization of linguistic systems. This theoretical stance supports the notion that interference patterns may persist when restructuring remains incomplete.

Odlin (2021) refines contemporary understandings of transfer by emphasizing the need to examine cross-linguistic influence as an empirically observable construct. He argues that interference should be analyzed through measurable patterns rather than anecdotal classroom observations. This approach strengthens the theoretical justification for quantitative research designs capable of identifying recurring transfer trends across learner populations.

### **2.2 Cognitive Co-Activation and Bilingual Processing**

Kroll, Dussias, and Bajo (2022) provide psycholinguistic evidence demonstrating that bilingual lexical retrieval involves simultaneous activation of linguistic systems. Their research indicates that both languages may remain active during production tasks, leading to representational competition. This cognitive overlap increases the probability of transfer, particularly in contexts where second language automaticity is not fully established.

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Otwinowska (2024) expands this argument by examining co-activation in complex production tasks. She demonstrates that even when learners attempt to operate exclusively in the second language, underlying activation of the first language persists. This finding reframes interference as a natural outcome of bilingual processing rather than as a deficiency in learning.

Smagul (2024) investigates classroom practices and highlights how sustained reliance on translation strategies may reinforce L1-mediated processing routines. Her quantitative findings suggest that instructional practices can indirectly stabilize transfer patterns by encouraging learners to access the first language during production. This perspective links cognitive theory with pedagogical realities.

### **2.3 Interlanguage Development and Recurring Transfer Patterns**

Han (2022) revisits the concept of fossilization in second language acquisition and argues that recurring non-target forms may, in some contexts, reflect stabilization within the interlanguage system. Such stabilization, however, is typically established through longitudinal and performance-based research designs that track structural persistence over time.

Montrul (2020) similarly demonstrates that structural influence from the first language may remain observable even among advanced speakers, particularly in morphosyntactic domains. Her findings suggest that proficiency does not automatically eliminate cross-linguistic interaction; rather, restructuring may remain partial across certain linguistic levels.

While these theoretical perspectives provide valuable insight into the long-term persistence of transfer, the present study does not attempt to measure structural fossilization or interlanguage stabilization. Instead, it examines how learners interpret and report recurring interference patterns within their own linguistic experience. Accordingly, references to persistence in this study reflect perceived continuity rather than empirically verified developmental stabilization.

### **2.4 Structural and Phonological Transfer in Arab EFL Contexts**

Al-Sobhi and Preece (2021) present quantitative findings demonstrating article misuse among Arab learners of English. Their research attributes these patterns to structural divergence between Arabic and English, particularly

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regarding definiteness marking. The study reinforces the predictability of grammatical transfer across learner populations.

Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2022) analyze syntactic organization in academic writing and identify consistent L1-influenced clause structures. Their findings suggest that learners rely on pre-established grammatical templates when constructing complex sentences. This supports the argument that syntactic transfer operates systematically across writing tasks.

Mahmoud (2022) investigates phonological interference and reports recurring consonant substitution patterns attributable to phonemic differences between Arabic and English. These patterns appear stable across proficiency levels, indicating that phonological restructuring may require targeted intervention rather than exposure alone.

### **2.5 Writing, Translanguaging, and Pedagogical Implications**

Tan (2024) examines translanguaging practices during second language writing and demonstrates that learners strategically draw upon their first language when organizing ideas. This process influences structural choices and lexical selection, highlighting the cognitive dimension of writing-related interference.

Al-Jarf (2023) identifies a direct relationship between heavy reliance on mental translation and reduced writing fluency. Her findings suggest that translation-based processing may delay automaticity and restrict lexical flexibility. This reinforces the importance of examining interference within academic writing contexts.

Alsuhaibani et al. (2024) demonstrate that structured pronunciation training can modify consonant cluster production among EFL learners. Their findings confirm that phonological interference is measurable and responsive to pedagogical intervention. This aligns theoretical models with practical instructional implications.

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## **2.6 Review of Previous Studies**

### **2.6.1 Quantitative Investigations of Grammatical Transfer**

Al-Sobhi and Preece (2021) conducted a quantitative study examining article usage among Arab EFL learners and identified statistically consistent misuse patterns linked to structural differences between Arabic and English. Their findings demonstrated that learners' errors were systematic rather than incidental, particularly in contexts involving definiteness marking. However, the study focused narrowly on one grammatical category and did not extend the analysis to cognitive or phonological domains.

Al-Khresheh (2020) reviewed interlanguage theory within Arab EFL contexts and highlighted recurring transfer in tense usage and syntactic organization. His findings reinforced the structural predictability of interference patterns. Nevertheless, the research primarily relied on descriptive error categorization and did not adopt a multidimensional quantitative measurement framework.

Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2022) examined L1 influence in academic writing and identified consistent clause organization influenced by Arabic syntactic structures. While their analysis confirmed structural transfer, it remained domain-specific and did not incorporate phonological or cognitive indicators.

### **2.6.2 Phonological and Pronunciation-Based Research**

Mahmoud (2022) investigated phonological interference among Arab learners and documented recurring consonant substitution patterns attributable to phonemic differences between Arabic and English. The study confirmed that pronunciation interference persists across proficiency levels; however, it focused exclusively on sound production without integrating broader structural or cognitive factors.

Alsuhaibani et al. (2024) explored the impact of web-based pronunciation training on consonant cluster production. Their quantitative findings demonstrated measurable improvement following structured intervention, indicating that phonological interference is both identifiable and responsive to targeted strategies. Despite its methodological rigor, the study

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did not situate phonological transfer within a broader interlanguage framework.

### **2.6.3 Cognitive and Writing-Related Studies**

Al-Jarf (2023) examined the relationship between mental translation and writing performance among EFL learners. Her findings indicated that heavy reliance on L1 translation negatively affected fluency and coherence. While the study emphasized cognitive mediation, it focused primarily on writing tasks without extending the analysis to structural or phonological dimensions.

Tan (2024) analyzed translanguaging practices during second language writing processes and demonstrated that learners strategically draw upon their first language when organizing ideas. Although the study provided valuable insight into writing behavior, it did not attempt to quantify interference intensity across multiple linguistic domains.

Smagul (2024) conducted a quantitative survey investigating teachers' and learners' reliance on L1 translation in classroom contexts. The results revealed that translation-based strategies remain prevalent in instructional settings, potentially reinforcing L1-mediated processing routines. However, the study focused on classroom practices rather than learner output patterns across linguistic domains.

### **2.7 Contribution of the Present Study**

Unlike previous studies that examined interference within isolated domains such as article usage, pronunciation, or writing, the present research adopts a multidimensional quantitative framework. By measuring reported interference across cognitive, phonological, syntactic, semantic, and orthographic domains within a homogeneous Libyan EFL sample, the study integrates structural and cognitive dimensions into a unified analytical model.

Rather than attempting to confirm structural stabilization, the study focuses on identifying patterned perceptual trends across domains. This approach allows for systematic comparison of reported interference intensity and highlights areas of heightened learner awareness. In doing so, the research contributes context-specific empirical insight into how advanced

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Libyan EFL learners conceptualize the role of their first language in English use.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Methodological Framework**

This study is grounded in a quantitative analytical approach, which is employed to systematically measure, analyze, and interpret the extent of mother tongue (L1) interference in English language acquisition among advanced EFL learners. The adoption of this approach reflects the study's emphasis on numerical data, statistical indicators, and analytical interpretation rather than purely descriptive observation.

The quantitative analytical framework enables the transformation of learners' linguistic perceptions into measurable variables, allowing for the identification of patterns, intensity levels, and consistency of L1 interference across different linguistic domains.

### **3.2. Research Design**

The present study adopts a quantitative analytical design aimed at transforming learners' linguistic perceptions into measurable variables. Rather than examining actual linguistic production, the study focuses on learners' self-reported perceptions of mother tongue interference across multiple linguistic domains. This approach allows for the systematic quantification of perceived cross-linguistic influence within a defined learner population.

The analytical framework is grounded in contemporary models of cross-linguistic interaction, yet it operationalizes interference as reported experience rather than performance-based linguistic output. Accordingly, conclusions drawn from the data reflect perceived patterns of interference rather than empirically verified interlanguage stabilization.

### **3.3. Participants**

The study was conducted among advanced EFL learners enrolled in higher education institutions in Libya. Participants were selected based on their academic level to ensure sufficient exposure to English instruction. The homogeneity of the sample allows for examination of shared perceptual patterns within a comparable proficiency group.

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## **3.4. Research Instrument**

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure perceived interference across five domains:

- Cognitive (mental translation and processing strategies)
- Syntactic (sentence structure and word order)
- Phonological (pronunciation and sound substitution)
- Semantic (idiomatic and lexical interpretation)
- Orthographic (spelling patterns)

Each item was constructed to capture learners' perceptions of difficulty or reliance on L1-mediated processing rather than objective linguistic accuracy. Responses were recorded using a Likert-scale format, enabling transformation of subjective linguistic perceptions into quantifiable indicators.

## **3.5. Data Collection Procedures**

The electronic questionnaire was administered during the academic year 2025/2026. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. Responses were automatically recorded and converted into numerical values suitable for statistical analysis.

The use of an electronic instrument minimized data entry errors and ensured consistency in the data collection process.

## **3.6. Data Analysis**

Statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive measures, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The standard deviation was used to assess the degree of dispersion in responses across items. It is important to note that standard deviation reflects variability in responses and does not constitute a measure of reliability or stability.

To assess the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated. This measure provides an estimate of reliability by evaluating the degree to which items within each domain consistently measure the same underlying construct. The obtained Alpha value indicates acceptable internal consistency, supporting the reliability of the instrument in capturing perceived interference patterns.

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The analytical focus was directed toward identifying recurring perceptual trends across domains rather than inferring structural stabilization within the learners' interlanguage systems. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting shared perceptions of interference rather than direct evidence of linguistic system restructuring.

### **3.7. Validity and Reliability Considerations**

Content validity was ensured through careful alignment between the questionnaire items, research objectives, and hypotheses. Each item was designed to measure a specific dimension of L1 interference grounded in SLA theory.

Reliability was supported by the consistency of responses across related items and the convergence of statistical indicators, particularly within cognitive and semantic domains, which demonstrated stable response patterns among participants.

### **3.8. Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and all collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes.

### **3.9. Methodological Summary**

In summary, the study is firmly positioned within a quantitative analytical methodological framework. The use of numerical data, statistical indicators, and analytical interpretation ensures methodological rigor and supports the classification of mother tongue interference as a measurable, systematic phenomenon in advanced EFL learning contexts.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Overview of Quantitative Findings**

This section presents and analytically examines the quantitative results obtained from the electronic questionnaire administered to 21 fifth-semester EFL learners. The analysis is grounded in numerical indicators, including frequencies, percentages, and comparative patterns across linguistic domains. The quantitative findings indicate that learners consistently report mother tongue influence across cognitive, phonological, syntactic, semantic, and orthographic domains. The results reflect structured response patterns across

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linguistic levels, highlighting areas of heightened learner awareness rather than direct measurement of linguistic performance or developmental stabilization.

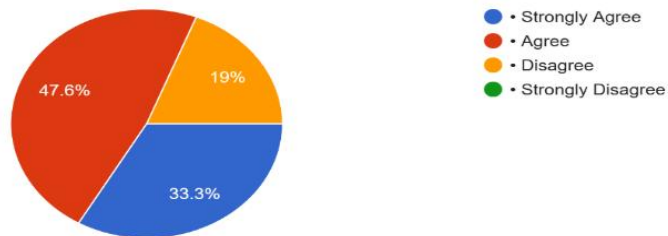
## 4.2 Results and Discussion of the Questionnaire

### 1. Mental Translation Before Production

**Table 1: Translation before production.**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	17	80.9%
Neutral	3	14.3%
Disagree	1	4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

1. I translate sentences from my mother tongue to English before speaking or writing.  
21 responses



**Figure 1: Learners' reliance on mental translation.**

The data indicate that a substantial majority of participants (80.9%) reported translating from their first language before producing English utterances. Only a marginal proportion expressed disagreement.

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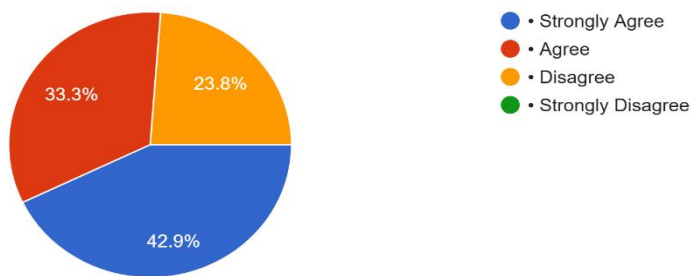
This distribution suggests a strongly shared perception of reliance on L1-mediated cognitive processing. The concentration of agreement responses reflects learners' awareness of mental translation as an active strategy in language use. It should be emphasized, however, that the findings represent reported cognitive tendencies rather than empirically observed processing behavior.

## 2. Phonological Interference

**Table 2: Phonological interference**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	16	76.2%
Neutral	2	9.5%
Disagree	3	14.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

2. My native language's pronunciation rules make it difficult to pronounce English words correctly.  
21 responses



**Figure 4.2:** Impact of L1 on English pronunciation.

A considerable proportion of participants (76.2%) acknowledged that the phonological system of their mother tongue influences their English pronunciation.

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The predominance of agreement responses indicates that learners widely perceive pronunciation challenges as linked to first-language influence. The pattern reflects perceived phonological transfer rather than direct phonetic or acoustic measurement of production errors.

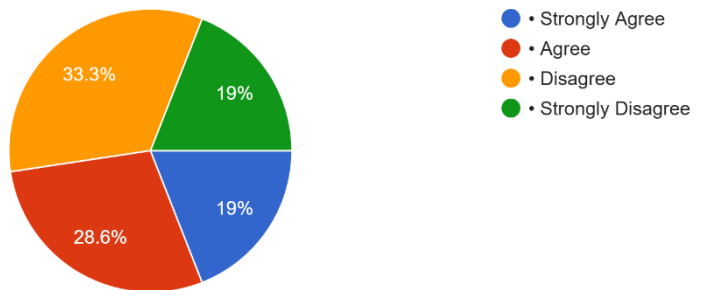
### 3. Syntactic Omission of the Verb “To Be.”

**Table 3: Syntactic omission in sentences**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	10	47.6%
Neutral	0	0%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree	11	52.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

3. I often omit the verb "to be" (am, is, are) because it does not exist in certain structures in my language.

21 responses



**Figure 3: Omission of the verb "to be" (Copula)**

Responses regarding the omission of the copular verb were divided. While 47.6% reported engaging in such omission, 52.4% disagreed.

The relatively balanced distribution suggests variability in perceived syntactic interference. Unlike other domains, omission of “to be” does not

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appear uniformly recognized among participants. This variability indicates differentiated perceptual experiences rather than consistent structural transfer.

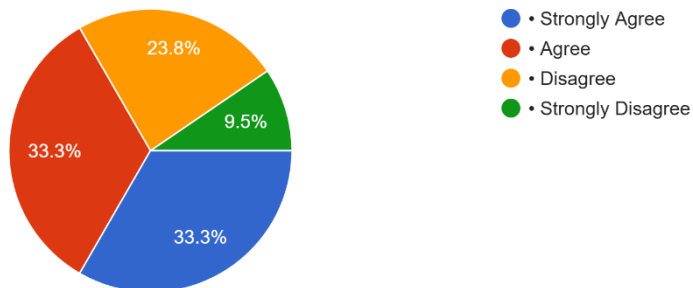
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	14	66.6%
Neutral	3	14.3%
Disagree	4	19.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 4. Word Order (Adjective–Noun Position)

**Table 4. Adjective-Noun position interference**

4. I tend to follow my mother tongue’s word order (e.g., adjective-noun position) when writing in English.

21 responses



**Figure 4: Transfer of L1 word order**

Approximately two-thirds of the participants (66.6%) indicated that they tend to follow the word order patterns of their mother tongue when writing in English.

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This level of agreement reflects a notable perceptual recognition of structural influence at the sentence level. The responses suggest awareness of syntactic divergence between languages, though they do not constitute objective evidence of systematic word-order errors.

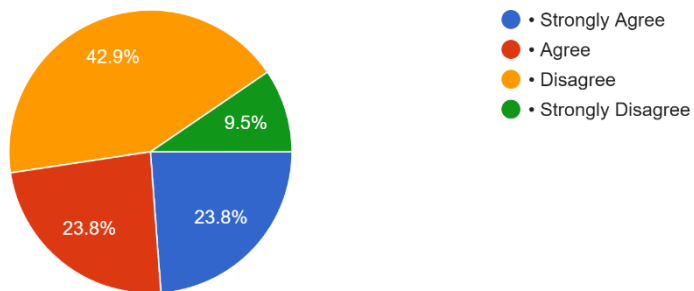
### 5. Article Usage (a, an, the)

**Table 5: Definite and indefinite article errors**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	10	47.6%
Neutral	3	14.3%
Disagree / Strongly Disagree	8	38.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

5. The way my native language uses articles (a, an, the) causes me to make mistakes in English.

21 responses



**Figure 5: Article usage errors due to L1**

Perceptions regarding article usage revealed a more varied pattern. While 47.6% agreed that differences in article systems contribute to mistakes, 38.1% disagreed, and the remainder remained neutral.

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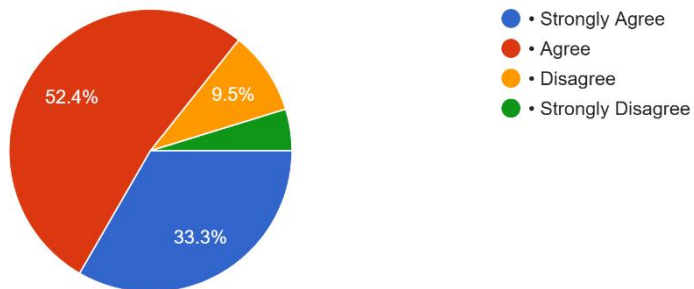
This distribution points to a divided perception of article-related interference. The variability suggests that sensitivity to article usage may differ among learners, reflecting heterogeneous awareness rather than a uniformly perceived structural challenge.

## 6. Literal Translation of Idioms.

**Table 6: Semantic and idiomatic transfer**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	18	85.7%
Neutral	1	4.8%
Disagree	2	9.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

6. I frequently use literal translation for idioms and expressions from my mother tongue.  
21 responses



**Figure 6: Literal translation of idiomatic expressions**

The strongest agreement was observed in the domain of idiomatic transfer, where 85.7% of participants reported frequently relying on literal translation of expressions from their first language.

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This pronounced concentration of agreement responses indicates a high level of perceptual awareness of semantic transfer. The data suggest that learners recognize idiomatic interpretation as an area where first-language influence is particularly salient. Nonetheless, the finding reflects reported strategy use rather than documented frequency of idiomatic errors.

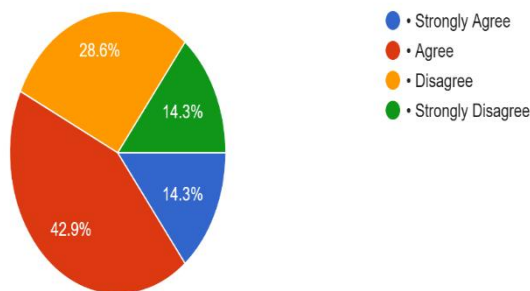
### 7. Tense System Interference

**Table 7: Errors in verb tense selection**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	12	57.2%
Neutral	6	28.6%
Disagree	3	14.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

7. My native language's tense system leads me to choose the wrong verb tenses in English.

21 responses



**Figure 7: Influence of L1 tense system**

More than half of the participants (57.2%) indicated that differences in tense systems lead them to select incorrect verb forms in English.

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The moderate level of agreement suggests that tense-related interference is perceived, though not universally reported. The dispersion across response categories reflects variability in learners' experiences of temporal transfer.

## 8. Orthographic Transfer (Punctuation and Capitalization)

Table 8: Orthographic interference in writing

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	15	71.5%
Neutral	4	19%
Disagree	2	9.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

8. I apply the punctuation and capitalization rules of my mother tongue to my English writing.  
21 responses

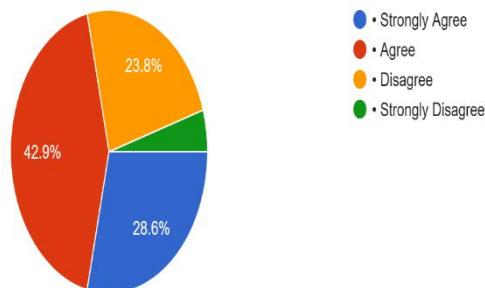


Figure 8: Transfer of L1 punctuation and capitalization

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A majority of participants (71.5%) acknowledged applying punctuation and capitalization conventions from their mother tongue to English writing.

This pattern indicates widespread recognition of orthographic influence. The responses suggest awareness of writing-system differences rather than measured analysis of orthographic error frequency.

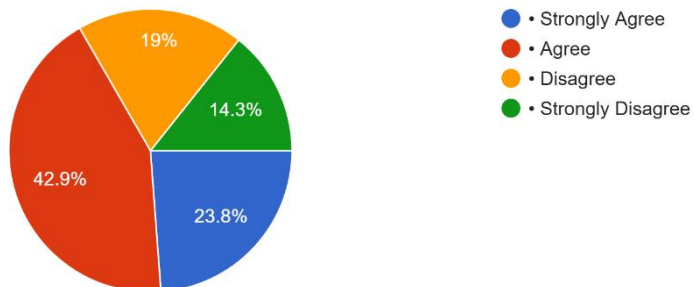
### Cognitive Fluency and Direct Thinking

**Table 9: Cognitive interference of the mother tongue**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	14	66.7%
Neutral	4	19%
Disagree	3	14.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

9. I find it difficult to think directly in English without interference from my first language.

21 responses



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Two-thirds of the participants (66.7%) reported difficulty thinking directly in English without interference from their first language.

This finding aligns with the high rate of reported mental translation, reinforcing the perception of continued cognitive mediation through L1. The consistency between these two items suggests coherent perceptual patterns within the cognitive domain.

### Perception of L1 as the Main Source of Errors

Table 10: Learners' perception of L1 interference

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree / Agree	15	71.4%
Neutral	4	19%
Disagree	2	9.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

10. I believe that mother tongue interference is the main source of my grammatical errors in English.

21 responses

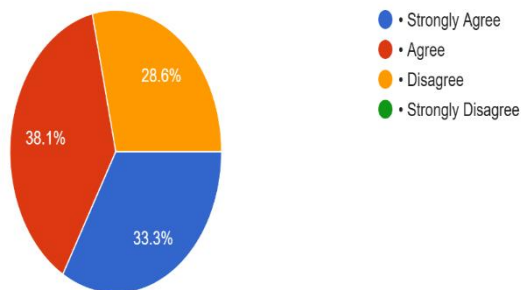


Figure 10: L1 as the primary source of grammar errors

Finally, 71.4% of participants indicated that they consider mother tongue interference to be the principal source of their grammatical errors.

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This response pattern reflects a strong attributional belief regarding the role of L1 influence. It should be interpreted as learners' perceived explanation of their difficulties rather than empirical confirmation of causal linguistic mechanisms.

### **4. Overall Analytical Perspective**

Across the ten items, the highest levels of reported agreement were concentrated in semantic and cognitive domains, particularly in relation to idiomatic translation and mental mediation. Phonological and orthographic interference were also widely reported, whereas syntactic features such as copular omission and article usage exhibited greater variability.

Taken together, the distribution of responses suggests that participants conceptualize mother tongue interference as a multidimensional influence, with stronger perceptual salience in domains involving cognitive processing and meaning construction. These findings represent structured experiential patterns within the sample and should be interpreted as response-based trends rather than empirical confirmation of structural interlanguage development.

### **5. Discussion**

The present findings indicate that learners conceptualize mother tongue interference as a multidimensional phenomenon operating across cognitive, semantic, phonological, syntactic, and orthographic domains. The strongest perceptual concentration was observed in the cognitive and semantic domains, particularly in relation to mental translation and literal interpretation of idiomatic expressions. This pattern suggests that learners experience first-language influence most saliently at the level of internal processing and meaning construction rather than exclusively at the surface structural level.

The high rate of reported reliance on mental translation aligns with theoretical models of bilingual co-activation, which propose that both linguistic systems remain accessible during second language use. Although the current study does not directly measure psycholinguistic activation, the consistency of reported cognitive mediation suggests that learners perceive L1 involvement as integral to their production process. The convergence between reported mental translation and difficulty thinking directly in English

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further reinforces the perception of sustained cognitive anchoring in the first language.

Semantic and idiomatic transfer exhibited the highest overall agreement. This may indicate that learners perceive culturally embedded expressions as particularly resistant to direct mapping between linguistic systems. Unlike structural elements that may gradually become automatized through exposure, idiomatic meaning requires interpretive flexibility. The prominence of this domain in the results suggests that learners recognize semantic transfer as a salient and persistent area of influence.

Phonological and orthographic domains also demonstrated strong perceptual agreement. These findings imply that learners are consciously aware of differences in sound systems and writing conventions. However, such awareness does not necessarily equate to measurable error frequency; rather, it reflects perceived difficulty and sensitivity to contrastive features.

In contrast, syntactic features such as copular omission and article usage produced more varied responses. This variability may reflect differential exposure, instructional emphasis, or individual differences in grammatical awareness. The dispersion across response categories suggests that not all learners conceptualize syntactic interference uniformly, which underscores the heterogeneous nature of perceived transfer.

Overall, the data support the interpretation that learners attribute significant explanatory weight to their first language when reflecting on their English difficulties.

However, given the perceptual nature of the instrument, these findings should be understood as metalinguistic self-assessments rather than empirical confirmation of stabilized interlanguage patterns. The results illuminate how learners interpret their own linguistic experience, thereby contributing to the understanding of perceived cross-linguistic influence within advanced EFL contexts.

### **6. Contextual Implications for Libyan Higher Education**

The findings of the present study carry specific implications for English language instruction within Libyan higher education institutions. The high concentration of reported cognitive mediation and idiomatic transfer suggests

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that instructional practices may continue to reinforce translation-based processing strategies rather than encouraging direct target-language conceptualization.

Limited exposure to authentic communicative environments may further contribute to reliance on Arabic-mediated processing routines. In many Libyan academic contexts, English is primarily encountered within classroom settings, which may restrict opportunities for spontaneous language use and naturalistic input.

Curriculum structure may also influence learner processing habits. If instructional practices prioritize grammatical explanation and translation exercises over communicative competence and contextualized production, learners may develop analytical awareness without achieving automatic processing fluency. This imbalance may help explain the prominence of reported mental translation and difficulty thinking directly in English.

Accordingly, English language programs in Libyan universities may benefit from increased communicative exposure, task-based learning strategies, expanded idiomatic instruction, and explicit contrastive awareness training. Aligning curriculum design with empirically identified learner tendencies may reduce reliance on L1-mediated strategies and support more autonomous second-language processing.

### **7. Conclusion**

This study examined learners' perceptions of mother tongue interference through a quantitative analytical framework that transformed subjective linguistic experiences into measurable variables. The findings indicate that participants consistently report first-language influence across multiple domains, with particularly strong salience in cognitive and semantic processing.

The results suggest that learners conceptualize interference not as an isolated structural issue but as an integrated phenomenon affecting thought processes, meaning interpretation, pronunciation, and written conventions. At the same time, variability observed in syntactic domains highlights the differentiated nature of perceived transfer.

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It is essential to emphasize that the conclusions drawn from this study relate to learners' self-reported perceptions rather than performance-based linguistic measurement. The contribution of the study lies in mapping structured perceptual patterns within a defined EFL population, thereby offering insight into how learners interpret the role of their first language in second language use.

By situating perceptual data within a quantitative analytical design, the research provides a measured and theoretically grounded perspective on cross-linguistic influence, while maintaining methodological caution regarding the scope of inference.

### **8. Recommendations**

1. Integrating contrastive analysis between Arabic and English into regular EFL instruction to explicitly address recurrent phonological, syntactic, and semantic transfer patterns.
2. Reducing learners' reliance on mental translation by implementing communicative, time-bound speaking and writing tasks that promote direct thinking in English.
3. Expanding focused instruction on idiomatic and formulaic language to minimize literal translation and enhance sociolinguistic competence.
4. Strengthening phonological training through targeted pronunciation practice, particularly for English sounds absent from the Arabic phonological system.
5. Encouraging metalinguistic awareness by guiding learners to identify and reflect on their own L1-based errors as part of the learning process.
6. Aligning curriculum design and teacher training programs with empirical findings from quantitative SLA research to ensure data-driven pedagogical intervention.
7. Conducting future studies with larger samples and advanced statistical analysis to further validate and extend the findings of the present research.

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