



Students' Perspectives on Bilingualism in Indonesian EFL Classroom: A Case Study on Teachers' L1 Use as One of EMI

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Abstract

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In today's interconnected world, where global communication is more accessible than ever, English has emerged as the dominant lingua franca. As a result, bilingual and multilingual speakers of English are increasingly common. Within the Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, bilingualism—often extending to multilingualism—has become a prevalent phenomenon, particularly due to the predominance of non-native English-speaking teachers who share the same first language (L1) as their students. This situation has led to the proposal of a "multilingual model" for English teaching, advocating for the strategic use of L1 and its associated culture to support second language (L2) acquisition. In contrast, the traditional "native speaker model" has been widely critiqued. Despite these proposals, the role of L1 in the EFL classroom remains contentious, particularly in Indonesia, where critics argue that its use reflects teachers' inadequacies in English proficiency. This study explores the use of L1 in the EFL classroom from the perspective of students, as they are directly affected by the linguistic practices employed. By focusing on students' perceptions, this paper provides valuable insights for educators, scholars, and policymakers regarding the implications of L1 use in facilitating or hindering English language learning in the classroom.

Keywords: Bilingualism; EFL Classroom; Teachers' L1 Use, Students' Perspectives.

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INTRODUCTION

To say that a world today is a multilingual community will definitely not be an overstatement. With the vast population of people who use and understand more than one or even two languages at once we will eventually find it hard to find people who are monolingual. In fact, the data say that more than half of the world is bilingual. In this bilingual context, it is undeniable that English plays an important role as the language that has been the lingua franca of the world across national

and cultural boundaries. With that being said it is not that surprising that it is estimated that there are more second language speakers of English than native speakers. This fact possesses various interpretations depend on what angle we are looking from. From the English Language Teaching (ELT) point of view, it suggests that 1) most users of English acquire the language by learning it and 2) English as lingua franca need to be taught as lingua franca with 'multilingual model' as opposed to 'native speakers' model.

In the notion that English has been a lingua franca in the world, it needs to be taught as a lingua franca and not as languages spoken by people from the English spoken countries called the native speakers. It is actually common sense that we cannot learn English with a certain native context while in fact it is used by people all around the world with their own culture attached. In one of his presentation, Kirkpatrick (2013) proposes that English can no longer being taught based on native's model in the multilingual settings like countries in Asia including Indonesia. He argues that teachers of English have to make use of the multilingual richness of society in their classrooms.

This study elaborates on the topic of bilingualism and its implications in Indonesian EFL classroom. The focus will be on EFL teachers' use of L1 in English



subject class and its various dimensions from students' perspective. It begins with the literature overview of bilingualism. After that the writer will present learning context of EFL in Indonesia before explain the procedures of the study. The findings of the study will be in the discussion session that will be followed up by conclusion and a list of recommendations for teachers.

Literatures on bilingualism

Bilingualism is defined as the ability to use two languages actively. Paradis (2004) states that bilingualism reflects habitual, fluent, correct and accent-free use of two or of more than two languages. So, we see here that Paradis does not separate bilingualism and multilingualism overtly which will serve as the theoretical basis in this study. Moreover, Hamers and Blanc (1993) argues that bilingualism is the ability to use at least one of the four skills in other languages beside the L 1. The two definitions inform us that bilingualism is an ability which various levels depend on how good the speakers are in both of the languages.

Letts (1999) sets two types of bilingualism according to its time period of acquisition. He argues that simultaneous bilingualism takes place where kids are exposed to the L1 and L2 at pretty much the same time. On the other hand, sequential bilingualism is where the exposure to the L2 happens after the L1 has been acquired perfectly by the speakers. It can be concluded then that bilingualism as the result of formal education that is going to be talked about belongs to the sequential type of bilingualism. The relation of this matter with ELT practice is reflected in theories proposed by some scholars that believe in the view that the postponed exposure of L2 will do good to students. The arguments lie in the hypothesis that says people will learn L2 better when they have been fully informed about their L 1. This will be discussed later in the discussion.

After talking about bilingualism and its types, now it is time to see how bilingualism is a cognitive process. It is undeniable that bilingualism has something to do to how the languages are being acquired and processed in the brain. There are plenty of researches that have been conducted in regard to this particular topic in bilingualism. From those various researches, some key findings can be derived:

- a. The processing of different languages occurs in much of the same brain tissue.
- b. When bilinguals are in "bilingual mode" they show significantly more activity in the right hemisphere than monolingual speakers
- c. Bilingualism enhances a person's ability to concentrate and protect against the onset of dementia and other age-related cognitive decline.

Those findings, however, will have actual role only in the level of approach and methods design in ELT.

In the context of ELT actual practice, bilingualism is relevant in at least two different ways; it affects brain development of the speakers and it is often the goal of ELT. The former relevance will influence the way language is acquired while the latter will define teaching practice in the language classroom. In this particular occasion, we will focus on the second notion about bilingualism as the goal of ELT. However, as slightly mentioned in the previous section, most EFL courses today either formal or informal ones need to revise their goal in adaptation to English role that has been shifted into the lingua franca among multilingual speakers in the world. EFL courses have to change perspective and stop the reliance on native speakers' model as the pedagogical target. Kirkpatrick (2013) cites Garcia that says: "We must understand that bilingual education does not accommodate the monolingual standards and we must avoid the inequities in comparing bilingual children to a monolingual child in one of the languages.

Furthermore, Kirkpatrick (2013) elaborates the idea by proposing some principles in EFL teaching with multilingual context in mind. The principles include:

- a. Success in L2 learning is measured by the speaker's ability to use the language in settings relevant to them, rather than measuring how close they come to the native-like performance



- b. Developing local multilingual EFL teachers is way better than importing native speakers.
- c. EFL classroom have to make use of the local language or students' L 1 to facilitate learning of L2.

The last statement that will be the main focus of the study can be tracked back to its initial proponents from thirty years ago when Atkinson (1987) challenged Krashen's (1981) idea about minimizing the use of mother tongue in L2 learning setting. He proposes some supporting reasons on how L 1 use can be beneficial in meeting learning objectives in EFL. It has to be noted though that the L 1 use has to follow some judicious principles to ensure its effectiveness. The principles include the level of proficiency of students, the availability of time, and lessons difficulty level among many others.

A more recent theory about the legitimacy of LI use in L2 learning can be found in Kumaravadivelu (2006) where he reports on three dimensions of Stern's teaching and learning strategy. These dimensions are going along with the concept of the post-method era that Kumaravadivelu and other proponents believed in. The first dimension is what he called the intralingual-crosslingual dimension. According to Stern, there are at least three reasons why L 1 should be allowed in to be used in L2 classroom.

First, when we learn a new language, we always set out from a language we already know. Second, our first language offers a frame of reference system for L2. "It is in the nature of linguistic and communicative competence that we behave as if the L 1 (or a second language previously learnt) is the yardstick and guide to our new Lr (pp. 282-283). Third, our native language and our native culture "are deeply bound up with our personal lives. A new language and culture demand a personal adjustment" (p.283). In short, bilingualism in EFL classroom will not only affect the pedagogic and communicative goal of the course but also the way L 1 is treated in the learning process.

The learning context

In Indonesian context, English is cemented as the major foreign language that is mandatory in secondary and high schools (as of 2013 based on the newly launched curriculum). It is a matter of fact then that the role of English subject is not nearly as important as math, science and Bahasa Indonesia that are taught from the primary school's level. However, the recent trends in English learning show the increasing interest of English in general public. Parents are now eager to make their children learn English from as early as preschool age.

From one perspective, it is a good development towards a more international profile of Indonesians students. However, from the other perspective, it is viewed as a destructive tendency that will lead to a nation that loses its identity through the loss of its national language. The government, as it turns out, is taking the latter side by omitting English subject from the primary school curriculum and give it its old status as a mere extracurricular subject that is optional. On the other hand, in both secondary and high school, English remains as the compulsory subject that is one of the subjects to be tested in national examination. The learning principles and objectives are usually defined by the government through curriculum. English subject is commonly taught twice a week. From this illustration, one might guest that EFL teaching in secondary and high school is going well.

Unfortunately, despite current urgency to produce human resources that can compete in international competition that force government to invest more time and attempt in upgrading the quality of ELT in schools, it results in little to no improvement in the actual practice in EFL classroom. Based on the result of the Indonesian English as Foreign Language Teachers Association (TEFLIN) focus group discussion some time ago, the EFL practice in Indonesian schools has various problems that lead to the unsatisfying competence of students. Those problems



include the lack of teachers' understanding of the curriculum and materials itself, the lack of integrated learning, and the focus on only cognitive aspects, among many others.

In the same discussion, it is also argued that the actual source of problems in EFL practice is mostly the lack competent teachers. However, it is worth noted that English teachers in Indonesia are multilingual local teachers that share the same mother tongue and cultural background with their students. As discussed in the earlier section, English in multilingual context need to be taught in multilingual model. The shared L 1 and cultural background between teachers and students thus will enhance the process of ELT in multilingual model.

In fact, this very topic was discussed in Jun Liu's (2009) article on non-native English-speaking teachers training. In the articles, Liu argues that nonnative English speaking teachers are actually superior to the native speakers because they understand students' learning and cultural background context much better than their native colleagues. Furthermore, being in same culture and speaking the same mother tongue with the students will also beneficial in the way they encounter students' learning difficulties. However, the practice in Indonesian EFL classroom is still very much ignorant toward that benefit. Even when teachers do use L 1 in teaching English, many parties, including the writer, accuse them for being unprofessional and incompetent. This accusation, on the other hand, is not without basis; lots of cases we encountered within this context of teacher's qualification has shown that most English teachers do not possess the required ability in the language to deliver the lesson in English. The question now is whether the incapability to use full English in EFL classroom is still a problem when we are now in the multilingual era where English will most likely be used to communicate with other multilingual speakers for whom English is a learned or additional language.

METHTOD

The data analysis in this paper is done through the qualitative analysis and aimed to present the perspectives of students on the L 1 use of Indonesian EFL teachers as one of medium of instructions. Students are courted as the respondents because they are the ones who get affected directly the process of EFL teaching and learning. In additions, asking teachers to be the respondents will likely result in biased information since they will attempt to hide some facts, they think will threaten their images.

The respondents of this study are 15 students from grade 8 of secondary schools who come from different schools and are taking a tutorial learning program at Nurul Fikri, where the writer teaches. The fact that they come from different schools will be a benefit in enriching the context of the study. Those respondents are given the questionnaires on their English teachers L1 use in the EFL classroom. Then, the data from questionnaire are analyzed to extract some conclusion in this topic.

The writer acknowledges some limitations of this study. First is the so called as the challenge of time. The study is conducted within a week period that it cannot cover a larger number of respondents nor uses any additional data collection method like comprehended questions and interview. Furthermore, it is relatively a localized situation that is probably the case only in Jakarta. Other studies conducted in different area or school setting will likely result in different conclusion. Finally, the study focuses only on the teachers L 1 use and English language use atmosphere inside and outside the classroom. Some more elaborate research related to bilingualism in EFL classroom will be necessary.

FINDINGS AND DISSCUSIONS

Findings

From data analysis conducted, some key findings can be derived in Table 1 below:



Findings	Percentage / Description
Use of English and Bahasa Indonesia	All English teachers (100%) use both English and Bahasa Indonesia in their classrooms.
Frequency of Language Use	73.3% of teachers use more English than Bahasa Indonesia.
Use of Bahasa Indonesia	Teachers tend to use Bahasa Indonesia for classroom chit-chat and giving examples.
Use of English	Teachers tend to use English to greet, give instructions, and explain materials.
Students' Perception of Teacher Language Use	93.3% of students believe teachers use Bahasa Indonesia to make materials easier to understand. 6.7% think it is to show the correct use of Bahasa Indonesia. None believe it is due to teachers' incompetence in English.
Necessity of Using Only English in EFL Classrooms	Only 20% of students think the use of only English is necessary in the EFL classroom.
Preferred Language Use by Students	80% of students think the best approach is to use both languages simultaneously.
Students Using English Inside the Classroom	60% of students use only English inside the classroom and describe the atmosphere as supportive.
Students Using English Outside the Classroom	Only 15% of students use English outside the classroom and note that their environment tends to be ignorant about it.

Discussion

People from outside the EFL teaching and learning circle may argue that native speakers are the best teachers for EFL classroom. However, more and more studies have been proving them wrong. Both teaching practitioners and scholars have realized that benefits of bilingual/multilingual model of ELT. The results of this particular study as well suggest that the same trend is taking place in Indonesian EFL practice.

Teachers' language use in EFL classroom

The data show that all EFL teachers in Indonesian classroom investigated in this study have made use of and promoted bilingualism at the same time by using both English and Bahasa Indonesia as medium of instructions. Moreover, according to the students, most of the teachers use more English than Bahasa Indonesia. This finding is particularly surprising since the general public opinion is that English teachers tend to use lots of Bahasa Indonesia in EFL class due to their poor English proficiency. In fact, teachers only use Bahasa Indonesia mainly in classroom chit-chat and giving examples. While the later use is pretty much appraisable and necessary, the former one is not. The writer base this statement on the communicative learning principle that believes students will learn best by meaningful use of language. Now, the classroom chit-chat is actually a golden opportunity to do just that because the language use is relevant and the atmosphere is informal which in turn will minimize students' affective filter.

On the other hand, English is used in greetings, giving instructions, and explaining the materials. The writer has to agree with the use of English in greetings and giving instruction because most of the utterances are used consistently on daily basis that students must have been familiar with them that I will not a problem. However, using English in explaining the materials is a little questionable since more than likely students will misunderstand some key concepts. In fact, in the writer's opinion, it would be better if teachers explain the materials in Bahasa Indonesia and later on give the examples in English. Then again, every teacher is free to manage their class in their own reasonable ways since nobody knows students' characteristics and needs better than the teachers.



Students' opinion about teachers' language use

By analyzing the data, the writer gets an impression that students generally have positive attitude toward teachers' L 1 use in EFL classroom. Almost all of the respondents think that teachers use Bahasa Indonesia in order to make it easier for them to understand the lesson. In fact, no one gets the impression that the teachers L 1 use is prompted by their low proficiency in English. It shows that English teachers today have competence they need to be a good English teachers at least as far as the students' opinion is being concerned.

Furthermore, with their own reasons, most students also seem to appreciate the bilinguality - in EFL classroom. It is shown by the fact that only 20% of them that support the use of only English in their English class. The other 80%, on the contrary, believe that the use of only English will be harmful. However, on the issue of the best language to teach English, all respondents uniformly think that the interchangeable use of English and Bahasa Indonesia is the answer.

English use atmosphere inside and outside the EFL classroom

In the EFL classroom context, it was found that students' English use is still minimal but is bound to improve. The improvement will certainly take place due to the supportive atmosphere in the classroom. Most of the respondent's state that both teacher and peers always support and motivate them to use English in the classroom. However, students are still holding back to use English outside the classroom. There are certainly numerous reasons for this. However, from the data gathered, it can be seen that one of those reasons are the lack of supports from the environment. This is actually a conventional problem found in countries where English is a foreign language. People still view English as foreigners' language that has nothing to do with them. In this context, teachers are required to play an active role in breaking that outdated assumption and at the same time encourage students to use English outside the classroom

CONCLUSION

In general, the study suggests that Indonesian EFL teachers use both Bahasa Indonesia and English as medium of instructions in their respective classrooms. This is viewed favorably by the students and goes along with the intralingual-crosslingual dimension of Stern's post method principles of teaching and learning. However, the study also suggests that there are still some improvements that need to be done in dealing with the bilingualism in the classroom. Here are some recommendations the writer would like to propose:

- a. Teachers have to raise students' awareness about the goal of EFL in the bilingual/multilingual context by showing them the role of English in today multilingual society
- b. Teachers need to acknowledge the certain context in which students need them to use L 1 or L2 to maximize the benefits of bilingualism to the learning process
- c. Teachers have to be aware of their roles as both the linguistic and cultural role model of the multilingual model of English use for students so they do not need to direct their students to the native-like use of English
- d. Teachers have to give more encouragement for students to use English outside the classroom in order to advance toward perfect bilinguality.

It is true that simply using L1 in the Indonesian EFL classroom will not magically solve every existing problem in the field. It requires many other attempts from every related party to do that. However, realizing the changing role of English as the world's lingua franca and optimizing L1 use to achieve the multilingual goal of EFL will at least get us a step forward.



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