



TEACHER AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE USE OF STUDENTS' L1 IN EFL CLASSROOM

Lailah Isrofatun Nahdiah*

University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, EX1 2LU, England
ln352@exeter.ac.uk

*Correspondence: ln352@exeter.ac.uk

Abstracts

This study reports the Indonesian language use as a mother tongue (L1) in an EFL classroom in a middle school setting. The goals are to investigate the realization use of L1 and examine the teacher and students' perceptions. A case study method is used in this study. The data are obtained through triangulations: classroom observation, students' questionnaires, and teacher and students' interviews. Thirty-two students and one teacher are involved. The basic frameworks in this study depend on Auerbach's (1993), Schweers's (1999), and Cook's (2001) frameworks. The finding shows that L1 is reasonably needed as a facilitator in EFL classroom. The benefits of L1 use are: for repeating unclear statements, asking for a translation, explaining grammar, checking for understanding, gaining attention, and making jokes. The teacher and the students show positive attitudes toward the use of L1.

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Introduction

For many years, the issue of the First Language (L1) use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom has been investigated. There are two beliefs whether L1 could be a help or a disturbance in learning a Second Language (L2) (Brown 2001). Krashen (2002) has stated that L1 is one of causes of error in second language acquisition. Negative transfers or interference errors can be caused by delivering L1 for reference to express something in L2. A theory from SLA (Second Language Acquisition), is a belief that the process of acquiring a new language should be treated like first language acquisition (Cook 2001). No other language should interfere to achieve a new language. Therefore, the separation between L1 and L2 is necessary.

In contrast, if L1 is in the appropriate portion, it will be very useful. Schweers (1999) mentions that students are encouraged to learn the target language by using L1. It gives them a sense of security for self-expression. He also states that L1 is needed to explain difficult concepts and vocabulary. In line with Atkinson (1987) statements, L1 in the classroom has several uses: eliciting language, checking comprehension, giving instructions, enhancing cooperation among learners, promoting discussions, and preventing the development of useful learning strategies (Nitiswari 2012).

English is a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Indonesian context, so students will rarely practice it outside the class, called immediate social context (Saville-Troike 2006). So, English here is only as a subject for study purposes rather than as a living-learning environment. Both teachers and students tend to use Indonesian or their local language, to communicate and interact with others.

An understandable language instruction by the teacher is needed to get clear information from the teacher. Undeniably, the teacher will use L1 to explain difficult words or phrases to make them clear and comprehensible for the students. When teaching beginners, teachers will lean on students using L1 (Manara 2007), because students at this level still have less knowledge about English. So as the context of my study, English subject has been removed from state elementary schools since Curriculum 2013 appliance. However, some elementary schools still teach English as a Local Content (*Muatan Lokal*), from Grade 4 to Grade 6 only. The obligation to learn English is started in class 7 of junior high school. So, the role of their mother tongue is as their prior knowledge to help them learn and understand English lessons.

Hidayati (2012) study reveals that the Indonesian language is helpful only when used judiciously. She also investigates that the teachers and the students perceive benefits of Indonesian language use in classroom, such as explaining grammar, explaining difficult vocabulary, and making jokes. University students who are not English majors are the focus of the study. Then, the result from (Hartono 2013) thesis says, “the use of Indonesian and English in the EFL classroom should be well balanced”. There are occasions when Indonesian is needed to use, but also there are ways for the teachers to exposure English such as providing a ‘reward’ to students who often do not use English in any sessions. It is because they are senior high school students who must be brave to face the world using English.

Many similar studies are conducted at a high level, in which the students have already passed the English courses previously. Regarding this, the writer does research to know the students with a beginning level of students who started studying English formally. However, in this study, the focus is also on the realization of what contexts for using the Indonesian language in the real activities of teaching and learning English. Then, the related utterances are put from the teacher and students’ interactions in communication.

So the purpose of the study is intended to answer questions:

1. What is the realization of L1 use in an EFL classroom?
2. What are the teacher and students’ perceptions of using students’ L1 in the EFL classroom?

Methods

This research uses a qualitative method and employs a case study approach. There should be triangulated instruments used to meet reliable data. So, the several instruments used were classroom observation, teacher’s interview, students’ questionnaire, and interview. Each research question is expected to be answered by those three instruments. Moreover, the data results from all instruments are transcribed, analysed, and interpreted qualitatively.

This study takes place in a public junior high school, in Bandung, Indonesia. The sample is drawn from 7th-grade students of a junior high school where the teacher not fully uses English in the English classroom. The teacher and the students of an English class who use mixed languages (English and Indonesia) for classroom instruction are the participants.

The several instruments are classroom observation, teacher’s interview, and students’ questionnaire & interview. Firstly, The researcher recorded the English class several times. This is to get the realizations in the classroom by knowing how much L1 use is on certain days. Secondly, he teacher is interviewed by the researcher using the audio recording to understand why she uses mixed languages in the classroom. Thirdly, Each student gets a questionnaire to

find out how the role of L1 is needed in the English classroom. The form has a Likert-scale option. Lastly, four chosen students were interviewed to find out more about their perceptions.

Exploring, understanding, analyzing, and interpreting are some of the things that can be done to get the research finding. The data from observation and interview are transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted. Then, the questionnaire data are analysed by scoring, calculating, and classifying the scale.

Results and Discussion

The Realization of L1 Use in EFL Classroom

The Amount of L1 Use

The amount presents how much the use of the Indonesian language is in the classroom. The finding is the calculation of the teacher talks from observation data, which is coded using the version by Polio and Duff (1994).

Table 1. The Amount of the Teacher's Utterances

Lesson	Category of Language					
	L1	%	L2	%	Mixed	%
1st	48	47.52	39	38.61	14	13.87
2nd	405	76.28	71	13.38	55	10.36
3rd	130	58.56	73	32.89	19	8.56
Average	194.3	60.79	61	28.30	29.33	10.93

Source: primary data

From the average calculation, the highest use of language by the teacher is L1 (Indonesian language) at 60.79%. By this result, the meaning is that the use of L1 does not hinder the learning process of L2 (Miles, 2004). This finding can be influenced by the students, the teacher, and the material.

Atkinson (1987) suggested that the high percentage of L1 use is still tolerable by looking at student factors: their previous experiences, their level, the stage of the course, or the setting of an individual lesson as written in Nitiswari (2012). Manara (2007) suggests that teachers surely will lean on using L1 to teach beginners. Participated students in this study are included beginners (grade 7 of Junior high school). Because this grade is the official start to studying English in school, not all of them have ever studied English in their previous level of school (Ministry of Education's Policy, cited in (Panjaitan 2013)).

Afterward, besides the student's factor, teachers also have an influence. The teacher has already taught English in this school for up to eleven years in this context. In the study by Sharma (2006), it is pointed out that "the more experienced teachers highly feel the need of using L1 in comparison to fresh teachers". It has a reason that the experienced teachers are already habituated to using L1, while the fresh teachers are still motivated to apply a new methodology of 'no translation'. However, the researcher has a contradiction of it. Sometimes, the terms 'experienced' and 'senior' need to be distinguished. Experienced teachers do not merely depend on the length of service. On the contrary, 'experienced' means that the teachers already follow many workshops and training so that impossibly they need too much L1 in their teaching practice instead. So, in this case, it is not because the teacher is more experienced, but because of the factor of age.

Lastly, Table 1 shows that the different usage of L1 dependson particular situations and conditions. Lesson 2 is mostly used the Indonesian language. The lesson is about doing a difficult classroom task for the teacher to explain in L2. So, the teacher approaches each student group to check the progress and ensures the clarity of the task. A study conducted by Pablo et al. (2011) reveals that the teachers utilize L1 depending on circumstances. To reduce lengthy explanations of conveying the meaning of certain words or expressions, teachers save time by requiring L1.

In the interview, the teacher answers that the ideal amount between L1 and L2 is better to use English, about 40% for these beginner students at inception. Then, it will be enhanced in the next semesters. This finding contrasts with the statement of Krashen (2002) that English should be fully used in the classroom. He further suggests that the more exposure the students get to the L2, the faster they can master it. The other suggestion comes from Atkinson (1987) that the ideal proportion between the native language and target language is 5% and 95%. Nevertheless, the reality in the classroom brings different results, in which the teacher applies a certain quantity of L1 according to the situations and conditions that occurred.

Afterward, the interview with the four students also concludes that they want the teacher to use L1 not much more than English quantity use. All the interviewed students believe that the Indonesian language may be used in no more than 50% of English use. As student 2 says, the target language should be used higher because that is the core objective in studying this lesson. By that means, the mother tongue use is only a support or an aid. L1 is better to be used judiciously with the right doses (Elmetwally 2012; Hidayati 2012; Manara 2007). Likewise, by not turning aside from the main purpose of language, 'communication', the teacher in this study has already done her best to practice English in the classroom.

The Occasion of L1 Use

Besides finding the number of teacher's utterances, the researcher also found the occasions when the teacher applied the Indonesian language in the classroom. It defines in what context and the time the teacher utilized L1. The table below shows the realization of L1 use (based on the observation result) based on the study by Auerbach (1993).

Table 2. The Occasions and Frequencies of L1 Use by the Teacher

Occasions	Frequency of Using Indonesian Language			Total	%
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd		
	Lesson	Lesson	Lesson		
Repeating unclear statements	6	11	8	25	10.38
Asking for translation	11	19	-	30	12.44
Giving instructions	16	60	22	98	40.67
Explaining grammar	-	6	-	6	2.49
Checking for understanding	8	39	4	51	21.16
Gaining attention	1	19	5	25	10.38
Making jokes	-	3	3	6	2.49
		Total		241	100

Source: primary data

The table above clearly shows that Indonesia's greatest number of times in each lesson is different. The different reasons for the usage of L1 depend on a certain number of situations and conditions. Meanwhile, the highest percentage of the totality is 40.67% for giving instructions. This finding is also in line with Khati study (2011). The frequent use of Nepali

language is for giving instructions (34%) to make clear what is being said. As Manara (2007) says, it will be difficult to follow the classroom activities if students do not recognize the instructions.

So, to make the students understand and do what they must do, the teacher repeatedly delivers the instructions until it is clear. The teacher must come to each group to lead the students to accomplish the task (personal interactions). In addition, it is also for saving time and keeping the activities stable and steady (Pablo et al. 2011). From the interview, the teacher implicitly says that she always tries to deliver classroom instructions in the form of English first. By employing this kind of strategy, teachers can increase the target language use for the students' learning. Moreover, Paker and Tuna study (2015) indicates that all teachers agree that explaining task/homework instructions is better in L1. The aim is to avoid any students' confusion and complaint.

Table 3. The Central Tendency Calculation in Questionnaire

Statement	<i>Bahasa Indonesia</i> should be used to facilitate complicated English classroom tasks.	
	Total Students' Vote	%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	6	18.75%
Agree	17	53.125%

Source: primary data

Then, from the questionnaire result, seventeen students (53.125%) agreed, and nine students (28.125%) strongly agreed that they expect their teacher to use the Indonesian language to explain their complicated classroom tasks and activities in detail. Swain and Lapkin (2000) point out those students prefer their teacher to use L1 in organizing tasks as a facilitator of complex classroom activities in their study. Similarly, students are permitted to use L1 in the group or pair work activity but not in the output of the task of presenting their ideas to the whole class (Cook 2001; Hidayati 2012).

Moreover, the teacher stated that L1 is useful as a backup when students do not understand what is being explained during the class. The students' lack of understanding can be seen in the students' confused and frustrated facial expressions when the teacher is asking. As Sharma (2010) says, the major tool for helping students understand is translating into L1. She uses it as a facilitator when students look confused in understanding the learning, even though they are motivated to study English. Meanwhile, the teacher better repeats the statements to get the students' attention.

Relating to this, to ease students' understanding of the lesson, teachers can better utilize L1 in clarifying difficult explanations. So as in the questionnaire, the participated students elect their choice about it. As many 21 students agree if their teacher explains some complicated lesson material in the Indonesian language. The central tendency interprets that most students have a strong positive perspective on the statement given. This result follows Schweers (1999), as written Kelilo (2012) study that L1 is an efficient device to explain difficult concepts during the lesson, allowing students to enjoy the materials with relaxed thinking. Also, another reason is that students might not want to lose the important parts of their teacher's explanation.

The interviewed students mostly answered that the Indonesian language could be used by the teacher in explaining the lesson and the task. They clarify that when the teacher explains something using English only, it will confuse them and not get the point. Other benefits are that L1 can be used by the students when giving questions or asking something to the teacher.

These responses have confirmed Ellis's 1984, in Elmetwally (2012) finding that teachers can choose L1 for practical actions, such as explaining lessons and organizing activities.

Teacher's Perceptions of Using L1 in EFL Classroom

From several observations, it can be found that the teacher utilized the Indonesian language and, in this part, will answer the question 'why'. The teacher believes that teaching English using an 'English only' policy cannot help students learn. She suggests that the role of student's mother tongue, either Indonesian or Sundanese language, is needed. The teacher further emphasizes that the priority in teaching is that make students understand. The regrettable part is when the students cannot follow the teacher's explanation. The result is relevant to Schweers (1999) study (1999) that when English fails to work, L1 beneficially should be used when there is an occasion of English fails to work. In addition, this finding is supported by Hartono (2013) that the teachers have positive perceptions about the combination of English and Indonesian language as an effective way to achieve maximum comprehension of the lesson.

As the teacher says, the success of teaching is that the students can follow the lesson. So, the teacher will not let the students miss the chance to understand the explanation. When the students start losing their attention, the teacher tries to get it back by explaining the Indonesian language or interrupting them by calling (Sari and Agustina 2021). By doing so, she watches them from any angle and focuses on one direction. In addition, Alvarez (2014) clarified the finding of his research that L1 will be utilized on certain occasions, such as acquiring students' attention. One of the roles of L1 is to refocus students' attention on the teacher when a teaching and learning activity goes on.

So, the teacher's perspective on using students' L1 in the EFL classroom is positive. The main reason is that the teacher is adjusted to the students' capability and needs. Especially the students here are included as beginners. The teacher also points out that her teaching objective is to make students understand the lesson. However, this contrasts with the primary purpose of learning a language, which is to use it for communication Morahan, 2007, written in Paker and Tuna (2015). It means the practice of speaking in L2 should be done frequently. Phillipson identifies that the more the students are accustomed to using the language, the better the result of mastering it 1992, as cited in Adnan et al. (2014). No wonder the teacher also does some interruptions to get the whole students' attention. Furthermore, if the teacher only applies English during the teaching, they will get confused, stressed, anxious, and even disappointed.

Students' Perceptions of Using L1 in EFL Classroom

Based on information in the distributed questionnaire, the students' previous experiences of studying English are varied. The data of the complete record are illustrated below.

Table 4. The Categorization of Students' Past Experience of English Lesson

Statements					
Studying English lessons in Elementary School			Taking an English course		
Never	Ever		Never	Ever	
	1-3 years	4-6 years		1-3 years	4-6 years
6	5	21	28	4	1
6 students	26 students		28 students	5 students	

Source: primary data

From the table above, ironically, it can be found the fact that some schools omit English as their lesson subject. Several pupils barely start to study English in grade 7. Fortunately, some

schools still apply English, even though starting from grade 3 or 4. However, this phenomenon refers to the Curriculum 2013 that English subject is no longer a compulsory lesson but a Local Content (*Muatan Lokal*). The Local Content here means that the decision to teach English lessons is up to the school's decision (Ministry of Education's Policy, cited in Panjaitan 2013). Meanwhile, students' perceptions can be described from the questionnaire statement about the students' preference for their teacher's language use in teaching EFL. It is found that the teacher is better to utilize a language in the balance use between L1 and L2 in the classroom. Then, another statement in the questionnaire that classified students positively perceiving the teacher's use of L1 is presented below.

Table 5. The Central Tendency Calculation in Questionnaire

Statement	Using <i>Bahasa Indonesia</i> prevents me from learning English.	
Answer	Total Students' Vote	%
Strongly Disagree	12	37.5%
Disagree	17	53.125%
Agree	2	6.125%
Strongly Agree	1	3.125%
TOTAL	32	100%
Central Tendency Interpretation	34%	Weak

Source: primary data

Based on the table above, the central tendency of the statement given is 34%. It means that students have weak perceptions of the statement that the Indonesian language can prevent their English learning. The six students who had never studied English before (table 4) mostly vote 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. They had a strong belief that beginners are allowed to use their mother tongue during the EFL learning process. By adopting the Jhon (2001) statement, it is said that getting a foreign language in school is like acquiring a mother tongue in 20 years. For this reason, it points out that learning L2 is not easy, so beginner students are inappropriate to use L2 only. Then Juárez and Oxbrow (2008) establishes that Students will rarely use their mother tongue when their L2 skills improve as cited in Elmetwally 2012).

Moreover, it is approvingly supported by the interview result. It indicates that the students prefer to utilize mixed language (English Indonesian) when learning English. Along with this finding, the four interviewed students also agreed and gave the same answers. They have a perception that studying English without being accompanied by the students' mother tongue will never get the point of the lesson. Since they do not know the meaning, sooner or later, they will get confused (Parhan et al. 2021). The role of L1 here is expected to ease their learning. This is approvingly supported by Duff & Polio's result (1994, cited in Tsukamoto 2011). He says that L1 can be used as an efficient tool to provide instructions and grammar and explain concepts that do not exist in L2.

Besides, the students also state their strong rejection of the prohibition of Indonesian language use. Students have a strong negative perspective on the L1 banned use. They all believe that not using L1 will lead to difficulty learning the L2. Once more, they further specify that it only gives them too much pressure. L1 can be useful in a classroom's relaxed atmosphere (Tsukamoto 2011). Then, Elmetwally (2012) states that the students claim not to ban the L1, but its use should be limited to the minimum. In his study, the teacher also believes that L1 is not something to be prohibited; it must be a bridge to learning. Instead, banishing the students' mother tongue can affect their progression negatively (Sharma 2010).

Conclusion

This study has two purposes: firstly, to explore the realization of L1 use in the EFL classroom, and secondly, to investigate the teacher and students' perceptions toward the use of L1. Regarding the aim, the realization here is directed to determine the real amount of how much and what circumstances the teacher applied the Indonesian language during the EFL teaching and learning activity. The teacher states that the quantity of L1 used each day is different along with the lessons' situations and conditions. According to the teacher, the ideal proportion for beginner students is 60% of L1 and 40% of L2. For the next semesters, it will change and increase gradually. Meanwhile, another result shows that the teacher utilized the Indonesian language for several functions: repeating unclear statements, asking for a translation, giving instructions, explaining grammar points, checking for understanding, gaining attention, and making jokes. The students also vote and state that those purposes can support L2 learning. It is found that the highest frequency of L1 use is for giving lesson instructions. However, the translation style of speaking by the teacher is not justified for daily use, such as delivering classroom instructions, doing greetings, and checking understanding.

Furthermore, the second aim proves that the teacher and the students have the same positive perception. The reason 'why' the teacher utilized the Indonesian language in the teaching process is because the students deserve to understand the explanation of the lesson. Therefore, students' native language needs to be used. Likewise, if the teacher uses full English only, the students say they will get stressed, confused, lazy, and even protest. Besides, six students have barely started to study English in this grade 7. It is because the existence of English lessons is up to the school's choice. So, they are at the beginner level and need L1 as their prior knowledge. The interview result shows that students agreed to utilize mixed language during teaching and learning. They further vote strongly disagree if L1 use is banned in the classroom. The students also have slightly objection to the too much use of L1. The interviewed students clarified that teacher better applies L1 to no more than 50%. This unique finding reveals that they realized that the main aim of studying EFL lessons is for getting much exposure in L2.

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