

Teachers' Attitudes toward the Use of L1 in the EFL Classroom

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Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sikap dan pandangan guru mengenai penggunaan bahasa ibu yang digunakan dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris dan mengetahui fungsi penggunaan bahasa ibu oleh para guru. Objek penelitian ini adalah 15 guru yang mengajar di beberapa sekolah di Banten, Jawa Barat dan Jakarta. Data dikumpulkan melalui survei dan wawancara. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa walaupun hanya sedikit dari mereka yang ragu apakah penggunaan bahasa ibu dapat berdampak negatif terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris siswa atau tidak, namun sebagian besar sikap mereka positif terhadap penggunaan bahasa ibu di kelas bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru menggunakan bahasa ibu di ruang kelas sebagai alat pengajaran dan manajemen kelas untuk memaksimalkan hasil belajar.

Kata kunci: sikap guru, bahasa pertama (L1), EFL, penutur asli

This study aims to determine the attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding the use of L1 in EFL (English as a foreign language) and to describe the functions for which L1 was employed by the teachers. The participants of this study were 15 EFL teachers teaching at several schools in three provinces: Banten, West Java, and Jakarta (Indonesia). To collect data, the writer conducted Likert-scale survey and semi-structured interview to two teachers. The results showed that even though there were few of them were in doubt whether the use of L1 might negatively affect students' English learning, their attitudes were positive toward the use of L1 in the English classroom. The results also indicated that the teachers employed L1 in the classrooms as a teaching tool and as part of classroom management to maximize the learning outcomes.

Keywords: teacher attitudes, L1, EFL, mother tongue

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PENDAHULUAN

In the EFL setting, the use of L1 (first language) has raised controversy. Blackman (2014) states “certainly most methods from the 1950s to the 1980s tried to limit students' exposure to the L1, with increasing intensities of intention”. She goes on to say that students acquire a foreign or second language best when their exposure to the TL (target language) is maximal through content learning in a natural, communicative, environment. L1 could become 'slippery slope' that may lead to a significant underexposure to the TL, which would probably lead to poor learning outcomes (Macdonald, 1993; Polio & Duff, 1994; Wells, 1999). Those who argue the use of L1 in English learning concern the minimal result students may have when they were exposed to L1 while learning English. Other researchers also warn against not to use of L1 excessively, but they support using it wisely in such cases as stimulating language, assessing comprehension, giving instructions, and explaining grammar (Pan, 2010) .

On the other hand, Harmer (2007) believes that L1 use encourages interaction between teacher and students at a basic level, allows learners to talk about learning, and enhances the social atmosphere in the classroom. In EFL, teaching students English without regarding their native language violates their identities as Yavuz (2012) states that teaching EFL learners without considering their native language not only disregards their identity and culture but also turns them into new born baby with an adult mind. Although some researches show the negative attitude toward the use of L1 in English classes, several other researches have presented numerous benefits of the use of L1.

Many researchers state that using L1 allows students to translate an English word quickly and accurately. When teachers give explanation of the word in English, it could not be guaranteed that students could understand it, and of course it takes longer to explain. L1 simply saves the time and effort of both teachers and students (Bowen, 2006; Najduchowski 2008, Swift 2006). Providing L1 in English classes provides students the opportunity to compare the structure of their native language to English. It is reported that comparing and contrasting L1 and L2 structures can make words more meaningful to students and help them understand the words (Bowen, 2006; Swift 2006). Villamil and de Guerrero (as cited in Pan, 2010), reports that L1 is an important tool for making meaning of text, retrieving language from memory, exploring and expanding content, guiding their action through the task, and maintaining dialogue. Furthermore, Hsieh (as cited in Pan, 2010) found that translation, one way of using L1, improved college students' ability to read English in terms of reading comprehension, reading strategies, vocabulary learning, and cultural background knowledge. Liao (2006) has observed that when the TL is the only medium allowed in discussions, students remain silent due to their nervousness or lack of English competence. In contrast, there is more

sustainable participation and meaningful communication when both L1 and TL are allowed as media for discussion.

The use of L1 has been considered as detrimental in ESL classes; on the contrary, mother tongue plays a crucial and facilitative tool in foreign learning process (Mart, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for more research to explore the potential benefits and drawbacks of L1 use on teaching and learning processes in a country where English is taught as a foreign language such as Indonesia. The present study was therefore conducted to investigate the attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding the use of L1 in EFL and to describe the functions for which L1 was employed by the teachers.

METHODS

The present study used a mixed method design. Questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used to collect the data for gaining information from 15 EFL teachers in three provinces: West Java, Jakarta, and Banten. They had taught English for 4-15 years. For the questionnaires, Google form-based Likert-scale survey was used with 1-5 scale. Scale 1 represented *strongly agree* while 5 *strongly disagree*. There were nineteen questions which were divided into two parts. The first part (questions 1-9) was used to see the teachers' attitudes toward the use of L1 in the EFL classroom, while the other part (questions 10-19) was prepared particularly to discover the functions of L1 in the EFL classroom. Semi-structured interview was used to explore the topic of this research deeply and to obtain more information from the participants. This study only interviewed two participants. The analysis of the data for the current study was done in Google-form survey which utilized descriptive statistics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the teachers' overall attitude toward using L1 (Indonesian) per item on the questionnaire (items 1-8). Based on the result on the table, it can be seen that the teachers responded positively on items one, two, five, six, and seven. 53% of the teachers believed that L1 should be used in English classes. 60% of them agreed that they should know the students' first language. Also, 63% of the teachers did not agree that L1 prevented students from learning English. Additionally, 53% of the teachers believed that students' first language should be allowed during English lessons. In addition, the majority of the teachers (73%) did not agree that they should follow an English-only policy in the classroom. Moreover, the majority of the teachers (73%) agreed that a bilingual dictionary was beneficial for students to understand the vocabulary that they did not know yet.

Table 1. The teachers' views toward the use of L1 in the EFL classroom

Number of Item	Statements	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
1	L1 should be used in English classes.	53	7	40
2	Teachers should know their students' first language.	67	13	20
3	Teachers should use their students' first language.	7	27	66
4	Students' first language should be allowed during English lessons.	53	14	33
5	Using L1 prevents students from learning English.	27	20	63
6	Teachers should follow an English-only policy in the classroom.	27	0	73
7	Bilingual dictionaries help students understand the new vocabulary.	73	7	20
8	I do not feel comfortable when my students use their first language.	19	54	27
	Total	316 (39.5%)	142 (17.7%)	342 (42.8%)

In contrast, items three and eight indicate a negative attitude toward the use of L1 in the English classroom. The majority of teachers (66%) believed that they should not use their students' native language. Additionally, about 27% of the participants thought they felt uncomfortable when their students used their native language; however, 24% of them responded neutrally.

Table 2. Teachers' views regarding the frequency of using L1 in the EFL classroom

Statement	Frequency				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I think L1 should _____ be used in the English classroom.	0	8	3	2	2
Average	0%	54%	20%	13%	13%

Table 2 indicates the teachers' overall view regarding the frequency of using L1 in the English classroom. As seen from the table, 20% of the teachers stated that L1 should 'sometimes' be used in the classroom, while the number of those stating L1 should be 'often' and 'always' used was equal. Moreover, 54% of the teachers agreed that L1 be 'rarely' used in the English classroom.

With regard to the functions of L1 in the EFL classrooms, there were two functions mentioned: L1 as a teaching tool and L1 as part of classroom management. Regarding a teaching tool, the teachers mentioned several activities such as explaining difficult concepts, introducing new grammatical rules, raising students' awareness of the differences and similarities between their native language and English, explaining English idioms and expressions, and explaining

the meaning of new words. For classroom management, there were some activities they did: giving instructions during task administration, maintaining communication between them and their students in class in order to avoid misperception, and helping students to feel more comfortable and confident, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 3. Functions of using L1 in the EFL classroom

No	Number of Items	Statements	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Teaching Tools					
1	10	Explaining difficult concepts	66	7	27
2	12	Introducing new grammatical rules	70	14	16
3	13	Raising students' awareness of the differences and similarities between Bahasa Indonesia and English	78	7	15
4	19	Explaining the English idioms and expressions	63	14	23
5	14	Explaining new vocabulary especially abstract items	69	7	27
Classroom Management					
6	15	Helping students feel more comfortable/confident	73	7	20
7	16	Giving instructions.	60	7	33
8	17	Building up a good rapport with students.	47	20	33
9	18	Expressing students' feelings and ideas when they fail to do that in English.	67	13	20
10	11	Facilitating complicated English classroom tasks.	60	20	20
Total			653	116	234
Average			65.1 %	11.6%	23.3%

As mentioned, this study interviewed two teachers (herein referred to as teacher A and B). They informed that they ever tried to make use of L1. Teacher A used it to avoid missing information because when once she used English only, some students could not understand the instruction clearly, whereas teacher B allowed the students to use it in discussion to deliver their idea when it was difficult for them to say it in English.

Teacher A said that she allowed her students to use their mother language when they wanted to ask some questions related to the concept of the material being explained. However, she translated into English so that the students knew the English of their questions and could learn from it. On the other hand, teachers B pushed their students to use English in the classroom, but when the students did not succeed, she would allow them to use L1. She said, "It could help them gaining their confidence."

Both teachers agreed that L1 could be a teaching tool. One of them used L1 to explain difficult idioms while the other used it to compare students' L1 with English so they could be aware of the differences. However, they minimized the use of L1 in their EFL classes and refused to forbid L1 in EFL classes. They did not agree if L1 was used excessively because it would reduce students' exposure to TL.

Findings of the current study show that teachers had slightly overall positive attitudes toward the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. This is in line with Elmetwally's (2012) finding regarding teachers' and students' perception toward the use of L1. He concludes that moderate use of L1 may be beneficial in EFL. Similarly, Harmer (2007) believes that L1 use encourages interaction between teacher and students at a basic level, allows learners to talk about learning, and enhances the social atmosphere in the classroom. Shuchi and Islam (2016) found that the majority of teachers in Bangladesh used L1 to help students comprehend everything clearly and and make students feel more comfortable and confident. When students are not allowed to use their native language at all, they will remain silent in class discussion because they are not confident (Liao, 2006). However, teachers must be aware of challenges that may rise when L1 is allowed in the EFL classroom. When it is used excessively, it can lead to negative effect that can decrease learning outcome (Macdonald, 1993; Polio & Duff, 1994; Wells, 1999). Nevertheless, when it is used proportionally, it can help students' progress in learning. It is in line with what Sharma (2006) argues that banishing L1 from English classroom would negatively affect students' progress.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the present study show that teachers had slightly positive attitudes toward the use of L1 in the EFL classrooms. L1 has two purposes in this regard: teaching tool and classroom management. The results also show that cautious and limited use of L1 was fruitful and could play an important role in facilitating learning English as a foreign language. Since the participants of this study were only 15 teachers, wider scope needs to be explored to get broader understanding in this matter. A further study might also look into the effect of the use of L1 in EFL.

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