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University Students' Perception Toward the Use of the Mother Tongue in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study identified learners' perceptions toward using the mother tongue and analyzed the function or occasions of its use in the EFL classroom. A mixed-methods design, employing classroom observation, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview as data collection methods, was used to pursue this study. The questionnaire items gained the students' opinion on two categories, namely: students' preference and occasion of mother tongue use. Twenty undergraduate students who took the Speaking course at a private university in Aceh were involved as the participant of the observation and questionnaire. Meanwhile, only three of them were chosen as the interviewee. The questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively. In contrast, the observation and interview data were analyzed qualitatively. The results indicated that the use of mother tongue brought positive and negative impacts regarding the students' perception based on their various English proficiency levels. The low level of English proficiency and intermediate students revealed a higher preference toward the mother tongue to understand the instructions, explain unfamiliar vocabularies, and understand the differences or similarities of English pronunciation and idioms. At the same time, the advanced students indicated a negative perception of mother tongue use. They chose to avoid using their mother tongue to improve their skill through maximum

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exposure to English as the target language in the speaking classroom atmosphere.

Keywords: Bilingual classroom, EFL students, mother tongue, perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The mother tongue role still becomes one of the most controversial foreign language teaching and learning issues for many years. Many educational establishments and educators who have attempted to ban mother tongue also tried to eliminate its use in the foreign language classroom to achieve educational purposes. According to [Cook \(2001\)](#), an English classroom could be implemented in one of three ways such as banning the use of mother tongue or first language (L1) in the classroom, minimized the use of L1 in the classroom, and maximized the use of target language in the classroom. The discouragement of mother tongue use in the classroom is created to enhance students' ability and reach communicative English classroom goals. In addition, it is also to create an atmosphere where the students could use the target language as much as possible in the learning process.

Furthermore, the mother tongue's role is perceived as having a negative or destructive impact on the learning process. It is claimed as one of the factors that are an insistence to replace the English Only Policy. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of the target language in most Indonesian EFL classrooms is expected to be maximized, and the use of the mother tongue should be minimized or even prohibited in all learning stages. Through this way, EFL learners are successfully expected to get as much exposure toward the target language. It is also hoped that they can reach the goal of a communicative English classroom.

In contrast, some scholars state that attempting to ban the mother tongue in EFL classrooms is impossible. They believe that the mother tongue could positively affect foreign language learning ([Alshehri, 2017](#)). The "English Only Policy" approach becomes a "constraint" for teaching adult EFL classrooms where teachers and students use the same mother tongue. Thus, the temptation to use the mother tongue, both for teacher and learners are hard to resist and avoid. According to [Khati \(2011\)](#), the prohibition of mother tongue use in EFL learning may affect the students' psychological aspects which cause the feeling of insecurity among learners and hamper students to express themselves freely. In fact, by using one hundred percent 'English Only', educators also can face challenging situations, especially toward the learning instructions and classroom interactions ([Yusuf, 2009](#)). Consequently, learners feel difficult to understand the materials and tend to be passive to communicate in the target language during teaching and learning.

In the educational sector of the Indonesian context, especially Aceh province, English is more likely taught or learned as the first foreign language, which becomes a learning subject in the school or university. It indicates that English mostly occurs in the classroom rather than implemented during daily communication ([Sari et al., 2020](#); [Sulistiyo, 2016](#)). The students still rarely use English to interact or communicate with others daily, caused by certain factors. This condition also may relate to the language use of the teacher in conducting an EFL classroom. Most teachers tend to use mother

tongue to make the difficult phrase or concept perfectly understandable by the students. However, in some cases, the students feel mother tongue use in the EFL classroom was not a good choice for their foreign language mastery. It can negatively affect their way of thinking in English and language transfer in their minds. For example, it leads the students to use the concept of the word-by-word translation when they speak instead of think in English directly. Meanwhile, some of them stick in good acceptance toward mother tongue use in EFL classrooms. It plays a significant role in facilitating learning English, such as helping them to check their comprehension, defining new vocabulary items, and guaranteeing their comfort and pleasure in the English learning stage.

Furthermore, to support the issues raised in this research, several studies have been conducted related to the use of mother tongue in EFL classrooms based on different perspectives of learners and educators. For example, Harmer (2007) shows that the mother tongue could give positive resources and contributions. There is strong evidence that the students prefer the teachers using mother tongue and indicate the positive acceptance toward its use because it can facilitate the learning process and keep the classroom social atmosphere in good repair. In brief, it showed that using mother tongue judiciously in EFL classrooms does not decrease the students' exposure to English. However, it can instead assist the learning process, such as explaining challenging vocabulary items, practice new phrases or expressions, discuss the difficult grammatical concept (Yusuf, 2009).

Meanwhile, some previous studies also proved that the mother tongue did not always positively contribute to EFL learning. Some experts believe that using the mother tongue has some adverse responses that can affect the students' English mastery. Zhao (2019) conducted research related to the negative transfer of mother tongue toward the target language, which led to convey the wrong meaning of word-for-word translation, negative lexical collocation transfer, and negative transfer of singular and plural forms.

Thus, from the elaboration above, the researchers were interested in researching to comprehend the students' various perceptions of mother tongue use in the EFL classroom. It further tried to figure out the occasion of its use in the English learning process. Accordingly, the researchers formulated the research questions as follow:

1. What are the functions of mother tongue use in the EFL classroom?
2. What are the students' perceptions toward the use of mother tongue in the EFL classroom?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia

Indonesia positions English as its foreign language, meanwhile its neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines view English as their second language (Gunantar, 2016). In Indonesia, especially in Aceh province, English is only utilized in several fields, such as foreign companies or offices and certain educational institutions. As a result, it is still hard to find the use of English in daily conversation and communication in Indonesia.

According to [Samingan \(2016\)](#), learning a foreign language requires accuracy, fluency, and clarity, particularly when both languages (native and foreign) have different elements of linguistics and structure. Those differentiations might be one of the factors that caused mistakes and errors when they learn the target language ([Yusuf et al., 2021](#)). It happens because most language learners are interfered with by the elements of their language background (mother tongue).

2.2 Mother Tongue

[Noormohamadi \(2008\)](#) attests that mother tongue or first language is an essential element for language learning which could be a part of intellectual ability. It is a language acquired since a person's birth, which impacted mental, moral, and emotional growth. In addition, according to [Khatai \(2011\)](#), mother tongue is a language that a person acquires first in his/her childhood. Also, it is the country's language where someone is living, and usually, it is spoken in the family ([Aziz et al, 2020; Aziz et al, 2021](#)). Moreover, it could be a part of a child's personal, social, and cultural identity ([Pillai, et al., 2015](#)) that represents the intellectual development, physical and moral aspects of education growth.

Mother tongue entails not only positive but also negative impacts on the process of foreign language learning. First, mother tongue is beneficial for the student's personal development, such as managing cognitive and emotional value. Several psychological and educational experiences proved that learning by using mother tongue is deeper, faster, and more effective ([Yusuf, 2009](#)). When the students learn through their mother tongue, they are learning concepts and intellectual skills that are equally relevant to their ability to implement its functions in their whole lives. The students' cognitive skills develop easier through this way ([Noormohamadi, 2008](#)). Second, the mother tongue has a significant role in improving the students' English ability. According to [Silvani \(2014\)](#), when the mother tongue is used appropriately, it could help the students and the teacher learn English, which is beneficial in facilitating the language learning process on some occasions. For instance, it helps the students to communicate, share ideas, build the meaning and concept within the group discussion. In addition, the mother tongue provides a good role to clarify instruction, pronunciation and express their frustration or difficulties ([Kasim et al., 2019](#)).

Moreover, mother tongue also benefits the teacher in certain conditions, such as giving instruction, explaining grammar points or complex concepts, defining new vocabularies, checking students' comprehension, and keeping the classroom atmosphere. Third, mother tongue also positively impacts foreign language learning for better efficiency and productivity ([Yusuf, 2009; Cudi et al., 2014](#)). Therefore, the mother tongue use in English classrooms should not be avoided because its benefits are undeniable and judged as a natural part of the EFL classroom.

Nonetheless, the use of the mother tongue is not always positive. The concept of mother tongue use in EFL classrooms can also be viewed as a transfer that negatively affects the learning process. First, it has some negative effects, such as over-reliance on mother tongue use may undermine the interaction in English or decrease the communication in the target language environment ([Sharma, 2006](#)). Then, it could hamper the learners from better exposure to the target language ([Sipra, 2007](#)). It can also invite the learners not to comprehend authentic materials because they keep mentally translating English into the mother tongue and vice versa. Second, the results

of mother tongue transference hinder the learners from producing good text writing in the target language, particularly at the early stage of its writing (Yusuf et al., 2021). There are still many mistakes regarding mother tongue, which were found in all students' writing text, such as the accuracy and word-order mistakes. In addition, it also makes the learning process longer, which takes much time because learners have to translate everything to their mother tongue first and vice versa. Thus, it could lead to an excessive dependency on the students' mother tongue from time to time. Consequently, the learners may fail to realize that using English in the classroom activities or EFL learning stages is essential to improve their writing skills (Urdaneta, 2011).

2.3 Previous Related Studies

According to the concept, the word 'perception' was derived from Latin words *perceptio*, *percipio*, which refers to "receiving, collecting, taking action of possession, and apprehension by using senses or mind" (Qiong, 2017, p. 18). Moreover, philosophically, psychologically, and through cognitive science, perception is an attaining understanding process or sensory awareness of information. Based on Qiong's (2017) statement, the process of perception is composed of three classifications: selection, organization, and interpretation. Moreover, in common terms, the concept of perception is described as how someone thinks, how someone notices things through senses of sight, hear, and the natural ability to understand or notice things fast. Therefore, it will be beneficial to understand others' points of view or perspectives toward the things of their surroundings. Also, it could be the way we judge or evaluate others and things that led people to perceive the thing that is defined as individuals' attitudes and character (Resmini, 2019).

Furthermore, the following explanation shows the analysis of perceptions toward using mother tongue or first language in EFL classrooms based on some previous studies. First, the study by Cudi et al. (2014) in Turkey proposed that most students also give positive perceptions and attitudes toward the mother tongue used by the teacher in an English classroom. This research also investigated the teachers' and the students' perceptions toward using native tongue in EFL classrooms from both views. In this research, the researchers showed that both views supported the opinions that using L1 in English classrooms should not be avoided because it was undeniable the has benefits of its use in English classes for better efficiency and productivity. Sa'd and Qadermazi (2015) researched sixty Iranian EFL learners. Their study revealed a strong tendency among the participants toward L1 used and its positive effects on language learning if used limited only in certain conditions. The overall result of this research indicated that a judicious, occasional, and limited use of L1 is a better way to take and manage EFL classes rather than include or exclude them. In addition, this research also explained the advantages of using L1 to clarify the classroom instructions and other linguistics points.

Meanwhile, Resmini (2019) argued that the mother tongue used in general English classrooms negatively affected the students. It can be seen from the higher participants respond negatively toward her research instrumentations. The students prefer their teacher used English instead of their mother tongue to explain English materials. However, although this research indicated negative perceptions toward mother tongue use, the participants still recognized its advantages in the classroom.

For instance, it helped them clarify the unfamiliar vocabulary and communicate the grammar points. Besides, the participants also recognized the disadvantages of using L1 in EFL classrooms, such as ignoring the target language. The students were accustomed to using L1 and tended to wait for the translation from the teacher or friends. She added that these kinds of situations could lead to the failure toward the maximum use of English as the target language.

Research by [Mahmoudi \(2011\)](#) further revealed that Iranian university students strongly rejected using their mother tongue (Farsi) and preferred the sole exposure to English. The overall finding indicated that the students were reluctant to use their mother tongue in the English language classroom and strongly reject the mother tongue for better exposure to the target language in the classroom.

3. METHODS

This study was a mixed-method design using both quantitative and qualitative data. [Creswell \(2014\)](#) noted that “mixed method research is an approach to an inquiry involving, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating it, and using a distinct design that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks” (p. 43). Incorporating techniques from both research traditions gives unique opportunities for the researchers to explore the research area in-depth and better understand its complex nature ([Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003](#)). Therefore, mixed-method was very suitable for this research because it sought to understand the natural function of mother tongue use in the English learning process. It further tried to comprehend the students' perceptions of its use in the EFL classroom.

3.1 Participants and Location

The sample of this research consisted of 20 students which were taken by using purposive sampling. These students are all English Department students at Universitas Abulyatama in Aceh, Indonesia. The second-semester students were purposefully chosen because most of them were at the early stage of English language proficiency.

Furthermore, from the 20 students, only three students were selected for the interview section based on their Grade Point Average (GPA). Students' GPA was used to determine their various abilities and scores in academic achievement, representing their various capabilities, especially in English mastery. Accordingly, one student from the highest GPA point is the representative of the advanced level students, one student from the middle GPA point is the representative of the intermediate level students, and one student from the lowest GPA point is the representative of the lower level students.

Moreover, the mother tongue of the students is Bahasa Indonesia, even though they are of the Acehnese ethnic. This is based on several things such as the family background, dialects, and the official language use in the Indonesian educational system. Many Acehnese language families have chosen Indonesian as the first language because they were motivated by several educational reasons ([Aziz et al, 2020](#); [Aziz et al, 2021](#)). For example, speaking in Indonesian will facilitate their children to adjust themselves to the teaching and learning process in the school, and helps them to mingle in the society or interact with others in Indonesia ([Al-Auwal, 2017](#)). Furthermore, Acehnese has a lot of dialects variation, which may create some

inconvenience for certain learners then, in the end, become an issue for them that hamper their willingness to express themselves and communicate with others. Therefore, to avoid such inconveniences and neutralize the differences among dialects, communication in Indonesian was considered the best choice to deal with the issue during the interviews.

3.2 Instruments

The data were gathered through observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The researchers did some adaptation and modification from several instruments of previous studies to obtain the suitable design of instruments as needed in this research.

First, the observation used was the non-participant observation, where the researchers acted as passive participants who did not interact with the students and lecturer during the learning process. In addition, the researchers did the observation to make sure whether or not the students and the lecturer used their mother tongue in the Speaking course classroom. It also aimed to see the occurrences of mother tongue use while the learning process took place. Finally, the researchers portrayed the use of the mother tongue by using field notes during classroom activities. It was formulated in the form of an observation sheet adapted from the previous study (Silvani, 2014), which was used to explore English learners' occasions on L1 in English classrooms. The classroom observation sheet can be seen in the Appendix.

Second, another instrument to enrich the data in this research was the Likert-Scale questionnaire. It addressed fifteen closed questions which were composed of two main parts. The first part consists of 11 items focused on the students' preferences/feelings (item 1-11). The second part consists of four items that explored the various occasions of mother tongue use in facilitating the English learning process (item 12-15). The questionnaire items of this research were adapted or slightly modified from the previous related study (see Elmetwally, 2012) that was used to explore the perceptions of English learners toward the first language use in the EFL classroom. The questionnaire items were reviewed and verified by two colleagues, experts in ELT, and piloted.

Third, the researchers also used an interview to collect in-depth data. It was gathered using a semi-structured interview in which the researchers initially formulated the questions as a general guideline during the interview session so that it could help focus on the data that the researchers wanted to gather. The interview items were developed based on a literature review (Cudi et al., 2014) related to the students' views or perspectives on L1 use in EFL learning. However, the follow-up questions emerged as the interview progressed to delve into more in-depth information.

The researchers are also concerned about the importance of measuring the accuracy and consistency of research instruments known as validity and reliability. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), validity refers to the appropriateness, correctness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of the specific inference researchers make based on the data they collect. Furthermore, reliability is defined as the extent to which a questionnaire, test, observation, or any measurement procedure produces the same results on a repeated trial. Schreiber and Asner (2011) declare that reliability is the consistency or stability of the values, test score, or weight measurement. Therefore, methodological triangulation was used in this study. This method involves the use of

multiple qualitative and quantitative methods to study the data. Hence, observation, document analysis, and interviews results were compared to see if similar results were found.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

This research was conducted through online platforms due to the Covid-19 disease spreading since early 2020. The observation was done by joining the classroom via WhatsApp group and Zoom meeting application to observe the learning process of the Speaking course. Furthermore, the researchers obtained the data from the questionnaire by distributing it online through Google Forms. Meanwhile, the interview was conducted using WhatsApp video call individually and audio-recording to record the participants' responses during the interview session. The questionnaire and interview items were formulated in Indonesian because they allowed the participants to express their ideas.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

After the data were gathered, they were analyzed in the form of descriptive analysis. The questionnaire data were analyzed and calculated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 for Windows. Moreover, the features and commands of Microsoft Excel were also exploited in making basic data tabulation of the questionnaire and sorting the students' GPA points. Finally, the questionnaire data were displayed percentages, its description then was concluded in the form of charts.

Meanwhile, the data from observation and interviews were analyzed using [Miles and Huberman's \(1984\)](#) theory framework, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In data reduction, the researchers made data selection from the audio-recorded data. The audio was heard several times, then selected or sorted based on the relevant themes which provided the answers to the research questions. Next, the selected data was transcribed or transformed into the written form. All irrelevant information was discarded, while relevant themes were coded and categorized. After conducting data reduction, the researchers displayed the data in the form of descriptions. The final step was to re-check data to avoid possible mistakes and make conclusions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results for each research question are provided. The findings are divided into three parts: data analysis from the observation, the questionnaire, and the interviews. The discussion is built up based on the research findings.

4.1 Functions of the Use of the Mother Tongue in EFL Classrooms

The data from observation and questionnaires were used to answer the first research question. The observation data analysis revealed that mother tongue was used

for several occasions during the learning process in the English classroom. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of observation.

The occasion of using mother tongue	Frequency		Total
	Observation 1	Observation 2	
Giving and clarifying instructions	III	III	7
Correcting friends' errors	I	-	1
Telling any technical problems of learning	II	III	6

Based on Table 1, it can be described that first, from the classroom observation result, the mother tongue was mainly used to clarify the instructions during the learning process. The lecturer used English first in giving the lesson instructions. However, sometimes the lecturer also needed to translate it into Indonesian, especially when the students did not understand or responded to the lecturer's questions. The lecturer wanted to ensure that her students understand and know what they should do regarding the topic given. In addition, the students frequently used their mother tongue to re-clarify the instructions themselves. It was done to clarify by asking some questions in Indonesian to the lecturer according to the topic. By doing so, they would know better what they need to do regarding the topic lesson of the day. To support this finding, (Khati, 2011) acknowledged that the students must understand what they have to do or understand lesson instructions to carry out the task. Sometimes, the teacher needs to translate it into L1 to ensure their students comprehend her correctly. In a similar vein, Cudi et al., (2014) also stated that sometimes the teacher needs to switch between mother tongue and target language while explaining instructions, particularly when giving complex lesson instructions and explaining the linguistic issue.

Second, another occasion of mother tongue use was in correcting friends' errors. When a student made a mistake, another student tried to correct it by spontaneously using his/her mother tongue. It helped them to avoid misunderstanding or wrong concepts in interpreting the topic. In the end, it was beneficial for the students to have a good comprehension of the learning materials. The findings of this study align with Harmer (2007) and Silvani (2014); they reported that the use of the first language or mother tongue had a very vital effect in checking how well the students understand the material. It could be proved by the teacher asking students several questions regarding the topic or asking them to repeat back the learning instruction using their L1 (Yusuf, 2009). Through this way, it will inform the lecturer whether the students understand the instructions and what she had to do to avoid students' misunderstanding of the material lesson.

Third, the students also used their mother tongue to tell any technical problems of learning. Since the online learning program was instructed by the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education due to Covid-19 disease, several students have faced technical obstacles in joining the classroom online (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Mulyani et al., 2021). For example, they had difficulty logging in to Zoom meetings or WhatsApp groups due to poor mobile networks. It might be because some of them came from and lived in different areas, including the remote areas where the signal is insufficient for the Internet. When they faced such technical problems, they expressed it through their mother tongue spontaneously.

These observation results were also supported by the questionnaire results, which indicated that the mother tongue had some beneficial roles and functions in supporting language learners based on how it was used (see Figure 1).

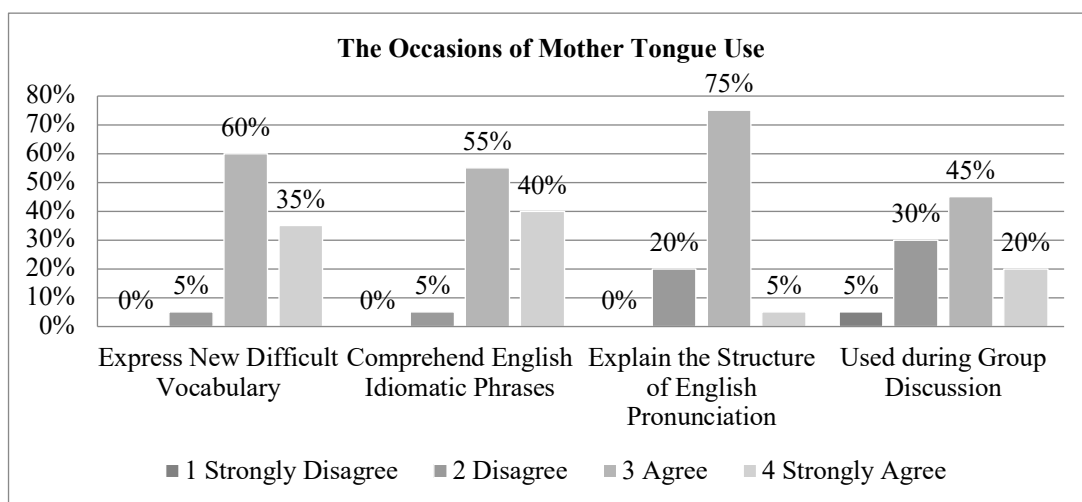


Figure 1. Occasions of mother tongue use by the students.

As shown in Figure 1, the results of the questionnaire showed that the students highly marked positive responses toward the occasions of mother tongue use in the English classroom. It means that the mother tongue use in foreign language learning may be beneficial on some occasions, such as expressing new difficult vocabulary, comprehending English idiomatic phrases, explaining the structure of English pronunciation, and using it during group discussion. Generally, these results were in alignment with the research findings of Cudi et al. (2014). They also discovered the L1 use in the English classroom was beneficial; and for better efficiency and productivity, the L1 use in the English classroom cannot be denied. It is hard to avoid expanding complex concepts, such as when teaching vocabulary (Yusuf, 2009). Furthermore, the L1 use assists language learners in comprehending the meaning of unfamiliar words, grammar complex structure, and it helped the teacher give instruction. In addition, the research investigated by Silvani (2014) revealed several beneficial contributions or occasions of using mother tongue by the teacher and learners in facilitating the language learning process. For example, when the teacher gave instructions, explained difficult grammar concepts, and defined vocabulary. Furthermore, Harmer (2007) also mentioned some positive impacts of using the mother tongue in EFL classrooms. For example, it was beneficial to get more detailed information, check the students' understanding, and keep the classroom in a good social atmosphere.

4.2 Students' Perceptions toward the Use of the Mother Tongue in EFL Classrooms?

To answer this second research question, the data from the questionnaire (11 items of students' preference) and interview data were used. Generally, the findings from both interview and questionnaire data indicated various perceptions of students toward the mother tongue use based on their difference of English proficiency level

(in this case, GPA point). The questionnaire answers relating to the students' preference items can be seen in Figure 2.

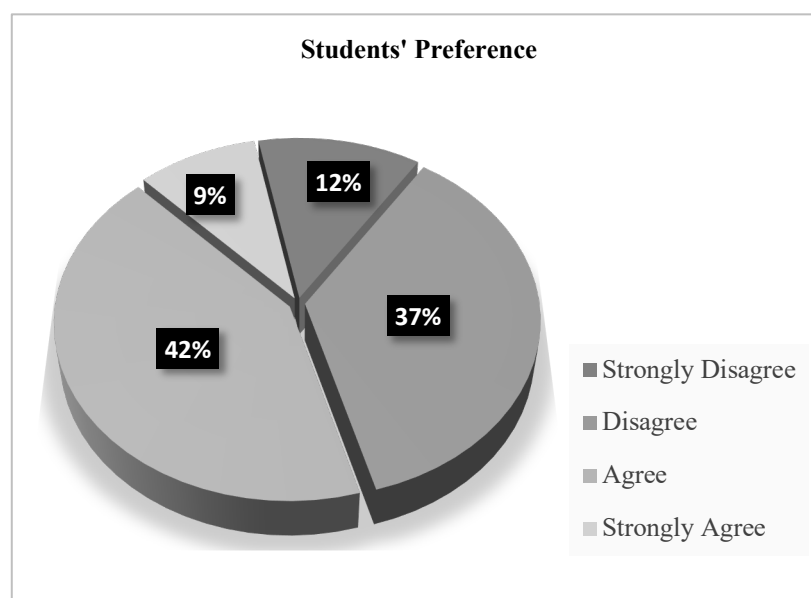


Figure 2. Students' responses according to their preferences toward the use of the mother tongue in the classroom.

The result of the questionnaire above revealed that 51% (the total number of positive responses) of students prefer mother tongue use in the classroom activity for some reason, as stated in the questionnaire items. For example, it helped the students understand material easier, made them feel comfortable in the learning process and boosted their confidence to express ideas. It was in line with the research finding investigated by [Fitriani et al. \(2017\)](#); they found that students agreed toward the use of mother tongue in the English classroom because it helped them to comprehend the material lesson easily and convey messages to each other without any misconceptions. This reason also might be one of the factors that required the lecturer of this study to include Indonesian in the English teaching and learning process. On the other hand, 49% of the students indicated that they preferred to fully use English in the learning process. This is because the use of the mother tongue negatively influenced their motivation, made them lazy to interact in the target language, and attracted them to be afraid of mistakes or errors in practicing English orally. Moreover, it made them dependent on the lecturer to understand the material lesson. According to [Anggrahini's \(2019\)](#) research finding, the implementation of using the mother tongue could decrease Indonesian EFL students' willingness, and feel lazy to explore English as the target language due to the dependency on the teachers' explanation in Indonesian regarding the topic lesson.

Furthermore, the results from the interviews on the students' views towards the mother tongue use in the EFL classroom revealed that the students of low proficiency level and intermediate level preferred the use of mother tongue, meanwhile the advanced students preferred English. Their responses showed that the mother tongue use helped them in learning English better because it enhanced their motivation to participate and involve actively in the learning process. Several of their statements can be seen as follows (S refers to Statements).

- S1 I think Bahasa gives a good contribution if it is used in English classrooms. For example, when the lecturer described the instruction of the topic lesson, it helps me understand it. Then, when I find a difficult and unfamiliar vocabulary to me, I think Indonesian really takes a role there. Moreover, it is our daily language, so it is hard to be avoided. I personally often use it, even in the Speaking class. It is comfortable, maybe because it makes me more confident. The use of Indonesian is effective in increasing comprehension, especially for beginners such as myself. (Student C)
- S2 I just agree if Indonesian is used in the English classroom, because it makes the conversation, explanation toward something or material lesson easier to be understood, clear, and fast rather than in English. It creates many pauses and takes more time to think. However, I still use English if needed, such as when the lecturer obligates us to use it, I will use it. In short, I prefer to use Indonesian, but it does not mean I ignore the role of English. (Student B)
- S3 I do not prefer if Indonesian is used in English classrooms, particularly in the speaking class, because it is an English-speaking environment. Of course, we must speak in English. Indonesian is still used in daily communication, but I used it under control as minimum as possible. For example, I only use it when I express or ask about unfamiliar vocabulary. I think the use of Indonesian is not effective toward our learning process of foreign language proficiency, especially when it is overused. However, if it is in grammar class, it still can be tolerated because it is used to explain the formulas and structure to avoid misunderstanding. (Student A)

The excerpts in S1 and S2 showed a similarity to [Al Sharaeai's \(2012\)](#) findings that the students' proficiency level correlates with responses and opinions on the first language use in the EFL classroom. The higher is their level of proficiency, the more students are willing to use English in the classroom. In contrast, the lower-level students used the first language more often than the higher-level students. They relied more on their mother tongue to keep communicate and express themselves comfortably in the classroom. It was also supported by the fact that they might not have much vocabulary compared to high and intermediate-level students. Nevertheless, based on the finding of the current study, the advanced students demonstrated high tolerance for mother tongue use in the classroom because they realized some of their friends still have limited English proficiency or ability, and they were still learning or developing the speaking skill. In addition, they acknowledged that the use of Indonesian could not be denied and still hard to be banned in the English learning stages because it is the daily language of learners. According to [Fitriani et al. \(2017\)](#), the effectiveness of mother tongue implementation in the EFL classroom was due to cases when not all students have the same ability in understanding the materials if it was delivered fully in English. However, it should be limited to the minimum use. There were some recommendations to reduce the excessive use of it in English Speaking classrooms by maximizing the English functions and allocating more opportunities and times for students to practice English orally. As acknowledged by [Elmetwally \(2012\)](#), the overuse of mother tongue might limit the opportunity for students to practice it and decrease their exposure to English as the target language. Then, similar to the research findings of [Fitriani et al. \(2017\)](#) which showed similar agreement, the students in their study also agreed that the portion of mother tongue use in the EFL learning process should not be excessive and only be used when necessary.

- S4 But on one hand, we have different levels of language proficiency in the classroom, so Indonesian still needs to be used by the lecturer. The condition causes it, even in some cases, it is hard to be avoided. Sometimes, the lecturer explained something in English first and then translated it into Indonesian to make sure we understood the points. Nevertheless, I want to minimize the use of Indonesian. It is only used in a certain context od when it is urgently needed. (Student A)

This study's results regarding students' perceptions showed that low proficiency and intermediate students preferred using mother tongue rather than advanced students. Their responses showed that the use of their mother tongue assisted them in learning English better, such as enhancing their motivation to participate and be involved actively in the learning process. It also attracted them to be more confident in expressing their thoughts and ideas. On the other hand, the research findings also showed that advanced students resisted using their mother tongue in the EFL classroom. These students believed that this condition did not lead the classroom atmosphere to feel like an English classroom. Therefore, they thought it was inappropriate to use their mother tongue in an English learning environment, especially in the Speaking course. Nevertheless, the advanced students also argued that the mother tongue is suitable and can be tolerated in Grammar courses to explain any difficult language concepts, structure, and formulas.

Thus, it was clear that the advanced students tried to refrain from using the mother-tongue in EFL learning because they wanted to have much exposure and desire to be competent enough in engaging themselves in the target language. This is compatible with the previous study investigated by [Mouhanna \(2009\)](#), which indicated that beginner students showed a more positive attitude toward mother tongue use in the EFL classroom than advanced students. In her findings, she argued that the higher is the English proficiency level, the less exposure the students get toward L1 use in the classroom.

Specifically, there were some contradictory responses toward the questionnaire items, which also indicated contrastive results. About 60% of the students indicated a negative response toward their preference when the lecturer used their mother tongue in the learning process. Meanwhile, when the students were asked about their comfortability toward the mother tongue use in the classroom, 50% of the students indicated a positive response toward the statement. Most students preferred the lecturer to use English in the speaking classroom, but some were still in the comfort zone of using their mother tongue. It indicated that not all students felt comfortable when the lecturer used the mother tongue in the classroom, but showed their preference when they used it themselves.

Nevertheless, based on the interviews, the intermediate and advanced students showed high tolerance with the low proficiency level students because of their limited English proficiency. In addition, they believed that the use of Indonesian could not be denied and difficult to be banned in the English classroom because it is their daily language, but to be limited to the minimum use. There were some recommendations to reduce the excessive use of mother tongue in English classrooms, such as maximizing English functions in EFL classrooms and giving students more opportunities to practice their English orally. Using English as the target language, assisted by the appropriate use of mother tongue on certain occasions, could support language learning and enhanced students' English mastery. [Elmetwally \(2012\)](#) proposed that the judicious use of the mother tongue positively impacted the learning process. It could play a significant role in facilitating learning English if it is used judiciously. In contrast, excessive use of the mother tongue could negatively impact the students, such as minimizing students' exposure to the target language. In addition, it could limit their opportunities to practice English.

Moreover, [Sa'd and Qadermazi \(2015\)](#) argue that the mother tongue use should be limited, judicious, and occasional for a better approach in the EFL classroom to

facilitate the English learning process, for instance, to clarify the explanation of linguistic points (lexical, grammatical, etc.). Then, Resmini (2019) also found that the use of mother tongue in EFL classrooms brought negative perceptions to the students. They gave negative views, but the students also recognized the advantages of limited mother tongue use in certain situations. It can be concluded that using English as the target language, assisted by appropriate use of the mother tongue on certain occasions, could support and facilitates the learning process.

5. CONCLUSION

This research sought to explore the mother tongue functions in the tertiary level context of education. It also investigated the students' perceptions toward its use in the EFL classroom. Based on the result of this study, the following conclusions were obtained. First, the students used their mother tongue in the EFL classroom on some occasions, and it carried positive functions to support their English proficiency. The findings showed that the students used it mostly in clarifying and understanding the instructions of materials or topics, explaining unfamiliar vocabularies and idiomatic phrases, and explaining the differences and similarities of English pronunciation. Also, it was beneficial to be used during group discussions.

Second, the findings showed the variation in perspectives among students based on the different levels of proficiency. The students in the low and intermediate levels of English proficiency indicated high positive acceptance towards the use of the mother tongue in the English classroom because it helped them learn English. On the other hand, the students in the advanced level showed a negative perception toward its use. They chose to avoid it because they want to improve their skill by maximal exposure to the target language (i.e., English) in the EFL classroom.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the present study has its limitations. First, to better validate the findings of this study, future related research should consider collecting data from more participants. Analysis should be done on more variables, such as students' attitudes toward mother tongue use in relation to their language(s) background, age, and gender. The connection between these variables should also be investigated. Second, the present study employed the GPA scores to determine the students' level of English proficiency. To make it more relevant, further researchers should also focus specifically on the students' speaking assessment scores to determine the students' level of English proficiency. Third, all the participants in this study were students majoring in English; other students majoring in other fields and also taking the English-Speaking course should also be taken into account in the future. It would be interesting to investigate the reasons and amount of mother tongue use among EFL students in the different majors, departments, universities, and regions.

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APPENDIX A

Classroom Observation Result

No	The occasion of using L1	Frequency	Total
1.	Giving and clarifying instructions		
2.	Explaining difficult concepts/ideas		
3.	Explaining new vocabulary		
4.	During group discussion		
5.	Correcting friends' error		
6.	Giving corrective feedback by the lecturer		
7.	Interact with friends to tell funny jokes		