Embracing Bahasa: Students' Perspective in Learning English

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Abstract

English is treated as an international language used all over the world. It is also used as a second language in some Asian countries, namely Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. Apart from that, Indonesia, as one of the Asian countries, treated English as a foreign language, which made the learners struggle harder to learn due to the different environment and certain conditions that made it harder to learn. Meanwhile, students are expected to be ready and exposed to the use of English. One of the ways to learn is through the preference for the use of Indonesian in English classes. A descriptive study is chosen for research. This study uses quantitative data intended for first-year students to get a percentage of the students' perspectives on the use of Indonesian in English classes. Based on the study, it can be concluded that first-year students generally have positive responses regarding using Indonesian in English classes. Students admitted the need for a balanced approach to language use in the classroom. While Indonesian can be beneficial, it should not overshadow the primary goal of improving English skills. English should be used more in interactions, particularly in the context of English learning. In short, the English teaching study should create or stimulate the students in an English environment where they can practice their English.

Keywords: *perspective, foreign language, mother tongue, language learning approaches*

Introduction

Languages are used for communication around the world. There are said to be around 7,000 languages used and found around the world (Leben, 2016). Among those languages, there are some that have been used or are even considered international as they have been used globally around the world. One of these languages is English.

The global use of English has made some countries one of the subjects learned by students, including Indonesia. Graddol (2006) stated that English is learned at almost all levels of education, including preschool and primary. Marlina (2012) even stated that English has become one of the languages that students need to study besides the national language (Indonesia) and the mother tongue.

However, unlike some other Asian countries, namely Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, that position English as a second language (Gunantar, 2016), English is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia (Marlina, 2012). This phenomenon results in the use of English in Indonesia, which is only seen in business, tourism, and education.

As English is treated as a foreign language, it is quite impossible for students to have a real conversation, a real textbook, or a real situation using English since English is not treated as a second language. Those students whose first language is not English are taught through Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (ESL teacher EDU, 2023). It is expected that students are able to use and apply English as a second language. They are expected to be ready and exposed to the use of English to get used to it.

However, Pardede (2013) stated that the students' preference for the use of Indonesian in English classes was quite high. It indicates that the students depend on Indonesian to learn

English. This also includes educators, namely teachers and lecturers. It reveals that teachers, lecturers, and students use Indonesian to communicate in English classes with the intention of students' understanding. This paper is to investigate what the students are thinking and if they are interested in using the Indonesian language before participating in the learning process.

Theoretical Review
A. Literature Review
1. The Use of The Mother Tongue

Herrlitz and Ven (2007) defined the mother tongue or first language (L1) as the language of primary socialization, the language developed by a child from early childhood. The mother tongue is the language that is first obtained, learned, and imitated. It could mean a national identity. The use of their mother tongue might make people attached to their customs, traditions, and homes when they are using their mother tongue, according to Sharaeai (2012).

One of the teaching techniques that uses the mother tongue to teach the target language is the translation method. Milawati (2019) named this technique the conventional approach because it requires students to translate sentences or words from the target language into their first language.

This technique appeared as the result of numerous protests against the grammatical method at that time. Most people believe that spoken language is more fundamental than written language. The discussion of grammar should be avoided. They claimed that language should be practiced as a whole rather than in parts (Cook, 2001). All teaching in the direct method is done in the target language; grammar is taught inductively; and the emphasis is on speaking and listening.

The debate over using L1 in language acquisition has been ongoing for years, with no method or technique that could be claimed to be the ideal method for teaching Foreign Languages (FL) or Source languages (SL). It signifies that the disagreement arises from a point of view or experience that differs from the others. Yough & Fang (2010) claimed that the use of L1 can help with vocabulary development, teaching language reading comprehension, encouraging self-regulation, clarifying task assignments, and promoting a learning environment. However, it is important to consider the dosage of using the mother tongue while teaching English. Cook (2001) suggests the use of the mother tongue to cover efficiency, learning, naturalness, and external relevance.

On the other hand, Ramanujam (2003) claimed that some unintended consequences may result from avoiding the use of the mother tongue: it may strengthen and sanctify the prevalent practice of unsystematic and unrestricted use of the mother tongue in the classroom. In other words, the mother tongue is usually used as a backup option when students find difficulties or lack confidence in using the target language.

Meanwhile, Xhemaili (2015) stated that English should be the primary means of communication in L2 classrooms, and students should be given enough chances to train in English as well as to practice as much of the target language in L2 as possible, both outside and inside the classroom. Students may get distracted when they use more of their mother tongue. This results in students being unable to communicate and use the target language (Hussein, 2013).

2. The Use of Mother Tongue in English Classes

In research conducted by Elmetwally (2012) in Saudi Arabia, a large proportion of students believe that using Arabic in class helps them learn English. The students agree that using Arabic motivates them to participate more in English classroom activities. It shows that the students prefer to use L1.

In the same location in Saudi Arabia, Machaal (2012) conducted research in which more than half of the total participants supported the use of Arabic EFL sessions. The students believe that the use of Arabic can assist them in explaining the language differences between Arabic and English. According to the findings, students in this study believe that Arabic is primarily a required tool for learning in EFL.

In Croatia, Dujmović (2007) conducted research that involved 100 participants. The students absolutely agree that Croatian should be used in English classrooms. The students need their teachers to use Croatian to explain complex grammar points and introduce some new vocabulary items.

In the end, students may have some benefits from what they have learned from L1 to assist them in learning the target language. They may also have more confidence since they can express themselves freely, articulate ideas, and participate more actively in discussions. This confidence might boost their motivation and willingness to take risks in their practice of the English language.

3. Bilingualism Method

Besides the method mentioned above, there is another method applied by De Houwer (2015) that investigated bilingual language acquisition. He focused on how children learn and develop two languages at the same time. De Houwer explained that bilingualism refers to the capacity to use two or more languages proficiently. A person who has learned and is able to use both languages successfully is called a bilingual person.

Bialystok (2017) found out that bilingual people frequently have superior cognitive abilities, such as higher attention and task-switching skills, better problem-solving abilities, and greater mental flexibility. Those who are bilingual can communicate in many languages, which improves their social engagement, economic options, and cultural awareness. It also allows them to have various interactions with people from different cultures and communities since they have a better understanding of cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and appreciation.

4. Grammar-Translation Method

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2013) study a variety of teaching methodologies and principles, including the grammar-translation method. The grammar-translation method mainly relies on translation. The method emphasizes accurate grammar usage, sentence translation, and reading comprehension, but it is weak at developing oral communication skills. In other words, grammatical rules, verb conjugations, and vocabulary lists are compulsory matters that students must know. Sentences or paragraphs are usually given in L1, then students translate them into a particular language or vice versa. Students are expected to improve their reading and writing skills as they do the translation exercises.

However, the technique seems to focus more on writing than oral communication. Brown (2007) criticizes it for putting too much concentration on written language but lacking communicative qualities. In short, the grammar-translation technique does not stress the development of oral communication skills.

5. Direct Method

One of the teaching methods explained by Richards and Rodgers (2014) is the direct method. According to them, the direct method puts more effort into oral communication, associates meaning with the target language, and avoids translation. To be brief, the direct method emphasizes the direct relationship between meaning and the target

language, with the goal of developing learners' oral communication abilities in the target language from the start.

Apart from other methods that have been mentioned before, the direct method focuses more on oral communication abilities than written language abilities. The aim of the method is to help learners understand and produce the target language. Brown (2007) also pointed out that the method of teaching is immersion, stressing oral communication, using context to convey meaning, and avoiding the learners' native language. With this method, vocabulary and grammar are introduced contextually to the students without any translation. Instead of telling the meaning in L1, students are taught to identify words and phrases directly with their meaning in the target language.

6. Communicative Approach

Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasized the significance of providing more opportunities to engage in real conversation while focusing on the development of functional language skills. This emphasis on effective communication is the primary goal of language teaching, especially in the context of English language acquisition. In short, this method uses a conversational method to teach English.

The communicative approach emphasizes the development of learners' capacities to use language for real-world communication and functional goals. It encourages meaningful connections, authentic language use, and the interdependence of the four language talents (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). This method aims to provide students with the linguistic and sociolinguistic abilities they need to speak effectively in a range of situations.

B. Conceptual Framework

The bilingualism method teaches the target language by using both the learners' native language and the target language. The grammar-translation method is a conventional method that emphasizes the explicit teaching of grammar rules and the translation of sentences, with little focus on oral communication. The direct method emphasizes using the target language directly rather than relying on the translation or the learners' native language. Learning a new language is obtained through natural dialogue, which includes listening and speaking exercises. Grammar and vocabulary are taught in context, in authentic conversation that shows real functional language use. The communicative approach is concerned with improving learners' communication abilities in the target language. The method blends the four language abilities (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and emphasizes interactive activities such as discussions, role-plays, and group work.

Based on the researchers' methods of explanation (bilingualism method, grammar-translation method, direct method, and communicative approach), they have historical significance and may have their own benefits in certain contexts. However, among the four methods that have been mentioned, the communicative approach is widely considered the most effective method for teaching L2. The ideal method or approach for teaching a second language (L2) depends on various factors, such as the learners' proficiency level, learning goals, and the specific context of instruction.

The communicative approach might be the most effective method because it emphasizes the use of language for meaningful communication, which enables learners to engage in authentic conversations, express themselves fluently, and understand and respond appropriately to different communicative contexts. The communicative approach also integrates various language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

This approach allows learners to acquire and practice these skills naturally in everyday communication.

According to Iwai (2011), EFL learners are a group of people who study a certain language (English) in their nations, such as Indonesians who learn English in their country. While ESL refers to those who study English in which English is formally spoken and used as a communication tool (for instance, ESL learners are Hispanics), The target audiences for EFL are people from nations like China, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea whose English is neither their mother tongue nor the official language.

Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines are the neighboring countries of Indonesia, but they position English as their second language (Gunantar, 2016). Meanwhile, English is considered a foreign language in Indonesia. In Indonesia, especially in West Kalimantan, English is only utilized and found in some foreign companies or offices and certain educational institutions. Therefore, finding English used in regular discussions and communication in Indonesia is quite hard. They might find some difficulties in having correctness, fluency, and clarity in learning the target language, especially when they are dealing with the grammar and structure of the native and foreign languages. This becomes one of the factors that create blunders and errors when learning the target language (Yusuf et al., 2021).

Darmi and Albion (2013) stated that the English language becomes the lingua franca for business communication purposes. English has become widely accepted as the language of business due to its ability to serve as a common ground for commerce and investment on an international scale. English is praised for being straightforward, adaptable, and flexible, which makes it a useful and effective means of communication in a variety of commercial situations. It is ideal for clear and accurate communication because of its simple syntax, vast vocabulary, and wide range of business-specific terms.

Language teaching in L1 has received attention, especially in learning the target language. Some claim that using L1 in English classrooms will weaken the students' ability to acquire the target language. They will lack confidence since they are unable to understand the target language. In another part, L1 is believed to be used as a teaching tool to maximize students' mastery of the target language.

Methodology

In this study, a descriptive study is chosen to do research that aims to describe students' perspectives from the English Study Program Faculty of Economic and Business University of Widya Dharma Pontianak regarding the use of Indonesian in English classes. This study uses quantitative data intended for first-year students with the aim of getting a percentage of the students' perspectives on the use of Indonesian in English classes.

The participants are first-year students from the English Study Program at the Faculty of Economic and Business University of Widya Dharma Pontianak. The researchers used the total sampling, which took all first-year students (2022–2023), which is 18.

The data is collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire is used to measure the perception of first-year students regarding the use of Indonesian in English classes. The questionnaire should be responded to by choosing one of the five options provided (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree).

The data is processed using the following formula to set the percentage:

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

P : Percentage frequency of any answer respondents
F : Frequency of any answer respondents

N : Number of respondents

To find the average of a questionnaire, it is described by the researchers using Likert Scale.

$$T = f \ (\ Degree/\ point\ of\ Likert's\ Scale)$$

T : Total

f : Frequency of any answer respondents

Finding and Discussion

A. Finding

The data indicated that most first-year students prefer to use Indonesian in English classes. The majority of the first-year students expressed a neutral response rather than agreeing or disagreeing that Indonesian should be used in all English classes. Using Indonesian in English Classes is allowed for students; it is more comfortable interacting in Indonesian in English classes, and using Indonesian can be a motivation to participate more in English activities. Those four statements were neutral at 72.2%, 44.4%, 44.4%, and 33.3%, respectively. The responses indicate that first-year students have diverse perceptions and points of view when it comes to the use of Indonesian in English classes. It also indicates that the majority of participants do not have strong opinions on the researchers' topic.Statement: Indonesian should be used in all English classes. 5.5% strongly disagree, 11.1% disagree, 5.5% agree, and 5.5% strongly agree. This statement gained the most support for neutrality at 72.2%.

A statement using Indonesian in English classes is allowed for students who disagree 11.1%, agree 38.8%, and strongly agree 5.5%. As in the previous statement, this statement gained the most on neutral, 44.4%. No one strongly disagreed with this statement. 11.1% of participants decided to disagree, and no one chose strongly disagree, showing that there is a small number of participants that do not agree to the use of Indonesian in English classes. They want the use of English to be utilized as fully as possible.

It is more comfortable interacting in Indonesian in English classes. 5.5% strongly disagree, 22.2% disagree, 44.4% are neutral, 22.2% agree, and 5.5% strongly agree. The statement gained the most points for neutrality. The statement has a balanced percentage of participants who disagreed and agreed to interact by using Indonesian in English classes.

The statement, it is easier to understand English lessons when lecturers use Indonesian. Strongly disagree, 5.5% disagree, 33.3% neutral, 55.5% agree, and 5.5% strongly agree.

Another balanced percentage of participants using Indonesian can be a motivation to participate more in English class activities. The statement gained 5.5%, 27.7%, 33.3%, 27.7%, and 5.5% for strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree, respectively.

Next statement, using Indonesian prevents students from learning English, gained 11.1% strongly disagree, 16.6% agree, 27,7% neutral, 38.8% agree, and 5.5% strongly agree.

Around 55 percent of students agree with the statement that it is easier to understand English lessons when lecturers use Indonesian. The students agree with the lecturers' use of Indonesian in teaching. The students think it would be easier for them to understand the lesson better. Students also agree with the statement that using Indonesian prevents students from learning English by 38.8%. It is quite contradictory, which points out that the students realize that using more Indonesian could affect their learning. There is a point

where students want the use of Indonesian to make them understand more in English classes. However, they also realize that using Indonesian could prevent them from learning.

B. Discussion

Their responses showed that the use of their mother tongue assisted them in learning English more effectively as well as enhancing their motivation to participate actively in the learning process. Furthermore, it encouraged them to express their ideas and thoughts more confidently.

There were some recommendations to reduce the excessive use of the mother tongue in English classrooms, such as maximizing English functions in English Foreign Language classrooms and giving students more opportunities to practice their English orally. Using English as the target language, assisted by the appropriate use of the mother tongue on certain occasions, could support language learning and enhance students' English mastery. Elmetwally (2012) argued that using the mother tongue selectively influenced the learning process. It could play a significant role in facilitating the learning of English if it is used judiciously. On the other hand, excessive usage of the mother tongue may have a detrimental influence on pupils, such as limiting their exposure to the target language. In addition, it could limit their opportunities to practice English.

Furthermore, Sa'd and Qadermazi (2015) suggest that mother tongue use in the EFL classroom should be limited, judicious, and infrequent in order to help the English learning process, such as by clarifying the explanation of linguistic topics (lexical, grammatical, etc.). Then, Resmini (2019) also found that the use of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms brought about negative perceptions among the students. They expressed 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 facilitate the learning process.

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 student's level of English proficiency. To make it more relevant, further researchers should also focus specifically on the students' speaking assessment scores to determine the student's 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 really interesting to explore the causes and extent to which EFL students utilize their home tongue in various majors, departments, institutions, and areas.

Conclusion and Suggestion

A. Conclusion

Based on the study conducted, it can be concluded that first-year students generally hold positive perceptions regarding the use of Indonesian in English classes. They perceive Indonesian as a valuable tool for facilitating better understanding, clarifying complex concepts, and creating a comfortable learning environment.

The use of Indonesian in English classes serves as a bridge for students transitioning from their native language to English. It helps them build their confidence, especially in the

early stages of language learning, by providing a familiar reference point and reducing anxiety related to language barriers. The participants emphasized the importance of using Indonesian strategically in English classes. It should be used sparingly and purposefully, focusing on enhancing comprehension and improving communication rather than becoming a crutch that hinders language development.

Students recognize the need for a balanced approach to language use in the classroom. While Indonesian can be beneficial, it should not overshadow the primary goal of improving English skills. It is important to gradually decrease reliance on Indonesian as students' language skills develop.

B. Suggestions

English should be used more in interactions, particularly in the context of English learning. It will impact the students' English abilities. Departing from here, the English teaching study program at Widya Dharma University in Pontianak should create or stimulate the students in an English environment where they can practice their English. Besides that, for the purpose of developing the consistency of language learning, lecturers must have taken part in a collaborative discussion and shared understanding. Thus, it will benefit the students' English, particularly their language abilities. In English classes, Indonesian should be allowed in some portions as it is used to explain material concepts. In short, it is ideal for lecturers to use English 70% of the time and Indonesian 30% of the time.

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