

Investigating Students' Perceptions of Teacher's Use of Bilingual Language in English Language Learning (ELL) Classroom

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Abstract

Students' perception of teacher uses two languages in class depends on bilingual approach used in English language teaching-learning. In this approach, teacher uses both students' first language (L1) combined with target language (L2) being studied to be a language instruction during teaching-learning English process to explain and teach English in English language teaching-learning classroom. This research aimed at describing students' perception towards teacher's bilingual language use in an English Language Learning (ELL) classroom and the benefit of using bilingual language in the classroom. It employed descriptive qualitative study to describe phenomenon of using bilingual language in the classroom with 10 students of 12th grade in Bahasa class at one of senior high schools in Cililin, West Bandung Regency as the participants of the research. In collecting the data, questionnaire and interview were used. The data was analyzed through Likert Scale using frequency percentage data. In the meantime, interview was transcribed to obtain the data. The result of questionnaire revealed that students gave their positive perception toward the use of bilingual language used by teacher in ELL classroom. Meanwhile, the result of interview showed that there were some benefits of the teacher's bilingual language use in learning English, namely making students easy to understand teacher's explanation in English lesson, making students understood new vocabularies in English, helping students to do English lesson exercises, and helping students to ask and answer questions during the class. The research findings are expected to give contribution to the improvement of classroom language instruction in ELL classroom which will be useful and make students easier to learn English. Keywords: language use, bilingual language, students' perception, English language learning.

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1. Introduction

Language used during learning process as a medium is known as the language of instruction. This language may or may not be the official language of the country. Moreover, it is also crucial aspect in the education world since teacher needs to explain learning material clearly using a language that students can understand. As a result, students can be more easily grasp the materials of the target language explained by the teacher. In Indonesia itself, the language of instruction used in the educational process is Indonesian. According to UU No. 20 of 2003 concerning The National Education System, there is also no regulation or education institution policy for the use of language instruction in order to conduct an English Language Learning (ELL).

In English Language Teaching (ELT), there are two major contrasting approaches regarding the impact of using students' first language (L1) in teaching English as a second or foreign language (L2): the monolingual and the bilingual approaches. Monolingual teaching advocates the English-only strategy and perceives students' first language (L1) as an intrusion that obstruct learning English while the bilingual think L1 is important tool that possibly will support learning English (Devaki, 2018).

Spolsky (1989) as cited in Musthafa & Hamied (2016), some exposures are indeed needed for everyone who is learning a language. In his book entitled Conditions for Second Language Learning, Spolsky (1989) explains that

the more time spent on learning an aspect of a second language the more will be gained. He also argues that in teaching English language, teachers tend to teach students how to use English language to communicate. Therefore, those aspects will affect learning process both in external and internal way.

In learning a new language, someone should have basic knowledge to be proficient in a new language acquisition. As stated by Saville-Troike (2006, p. 18, cited in Nursanti, 2016, p. 160) that since L2 acquisition follows L1 acquisition, a major component of the initial state for L2 learning must be prior knowledge of L1. Students will acquire the L2 when they have a prior knowledge of L1 in which responsible for the transfer from L1 to L2 during second language development. In the target language or second language, learning process that prior knowledge helps students to develop their second language acquisition and act as a tool to be proficient in it. On the contrary, in determining the language that is used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, teachers actually have two kinds of instructional language alternative: teachers can use English only or English with Bahasa or students' first language. It is in line with the report of U.S. Department of Education (2012) as cited in Nursanti (2016), it is reported that there are two kinds of language of instruction for conducting an English Language Learning (ELL) classroom, they are English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual language. According to Webster's dictionary (1961) as cited in Hamers & Blanc (2000), bilingual is defined as having or using two languages especially as spoken with the fluency characteristic of a native speaker; a person using two languages especially habitually and with control like that of a native speaker.

Teachers can use English only if they have considered that all of their students at the same level which is in the high level that can understand all the material that explained by the teachers using English only. If not, the teacher should use bilingual language, in this case Indonesian language and English, which can help students who are in the low level in mastering English to understand the material that explained by the teacher. Nunan and Lamb (1996) as cited in Alshammari (2011) claims that the exclusion of the mother tongue especially with monolingual students at lower English proficiency levels seems to be impossible. English acts as a foreign language in Indonesia, thus it will be difficult for teachers to use English only in the process of learning English since students cannot understand the materials explained by the teachers using English only. It was supported by Harbord (1992) cited in Alshammari (2011), he points out that many ELT teachers have tried to create English only classrooms but have found they have failed to get the meaning across, leading to student incomprehension and resentment.

Hence, the use of bilingual language is very important in the process of learning English. It will make teacher and student easy to communicate and make students easy to understand the materials explained by the teacher. In Indonesia, Indonesian language or the students' first language can be used effectively in the classroom not only as a way of conveying foreign language meaning but also as a shortcut for explaining tasks and test requirements, as a way of explaining grammar, and as a way for practicing foreign language user structure as code-switching (Cook, 2005, as cited in Kuhi & Abdolyash, 2014). Some teachers also argue that using first language can live classroom atmosphere (Agustin & Mujiyanto, 2015).

In ELL classroom in Indonesia, ideally, teachers give instruction and communicate with students using English or exposure to use English language. However, in Indonesia itself, mostly teachers teach English using Indonesian language or their first language in ELL classroom. Nonetheless, in Indonesian context, there is also no regulation or policy from educational institutions regarding the use of language instruction to set up an ELL classroom. Teachers who teach English as the learning subject determine the language instruction in ELL classroom. Teachers decide the language use based on their own beliefs or their used methods for teaching the language. In addition, to decide language use for directing their ELL classroom, teachers have two main options of language instruction; whether (1) using English only or (2) English is combined with Indonesian language or students' first language (L1).

The use of the language of instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom at the senior high school level remains a contested topic in educational discourse in Indonesia. Although the national curriculum emphasizes the maximum use of English to create an immersive learning environment, classroom realities indicate that teachers frequently shift to Indonesian language (L1) as a pedagogical strategy (Wijayanti & Syahruzah, 2021). In this sense, such bilingual practices, commonly referred to as code-switching, are viewed as a bridge to address the heterogeneous cognitive and linguistic limitations of students at the secondary school level.

A study by Nursanti (2016) demonstrates that students hold positive perceptions of teachers' use of bilingual language practices. In particular, the use of Indonesian language is considered highly beneficial for clarifying difficult instructions and facilitating the understanding of new vocabulary. At the senior high school level, language anxiety often emerges as a major barrier; in this context, teachers' use of the first language functions as an affective support that enhances students' sense of comfort (Nursanti, 2016).

Moreover, recent research conducted by Yuvita et. al. (2022) highlight that students' perceptions are now also shaped by the integration of digital technology in learning. In this context, senior high school students tend to be more open to be flexible in bilingual approaches, in which Indonesian language is used strategically to clarify abstract concepts that are not fully conveyed through the target language. However, the emerging challenges lies in maintaining a balance so that the use of the first language (L1) does not become dominant and thereby reduce students' opportunities to engage in active language practice. Several empirical studies have demonstrated students' perception of bilingual teaching practices. For instance, Surayatika (2019) found that students show their positive perceptions to the use of bilingual language done by the teacher as language instruction in their English classroom. Similarly, Nursanti (2016) highlighted that students show their positive perceptions to the use of bilingual language done by the teacher as language instruction in their English classroom. Moreover, she also highlighted that there are six benefits of teacher's bilingual language use for students in learning English; making them easy to understand what the teacher explained in English lesson, feeling comfortable during the class, making easy to understand new vocabularies in English, helping students to do exercises, helping students to ask and answer something during the class, and helping students to read something in English correctly.

Both literatures have examined the students' perception to the use of teacher's bilingual language in English classroom. However, there is limited research on students' perception of teacher's bilingual language use manifest in Indonesia secondary schools, particularly in rural contexts and specifically in Bahasa class. This gap in the literature underscores the need for localized studies that examine students' perception of teacher's bilingual language use within specific educational and cultural contexts. This study aims to describe students' perception of bilingual teaching practices at a senior high school in Cililin, West Bandung Regency and the benefit of the use of bilingual language in ELL classroom. By categorizing the benefits of teacher's bilingual language use, this study seeks to provide insights into how bilingual teaching practice can lead to the improvement of classroom language instruction used by teacher in an ELL classroom. While previous studies have focused on broad patterns of teacher's bilingual language practice in EFL settings, this study offers a localized perspective by investigating the specific case at a senior high school in Cililin, West Bandung Regency.

The findings are expected to contribute to the improvement of classroom language instruction in ELL classroom which will be useful and make students easier to learn English. Moreover, this study is also expected to give contribution as a basis literature since particularly in light of the ongoing shift in the Indonesian educational paradigm, which places greater emphasis on student-centered learning. In this regard, understanding senior high school students' perceptions can assist teachers in several important ways. First, it enables teachers to determine an appropriate proportion of language use that avoids the development of linguistics dependency. Second, it helps reduce students' psychological barriers in learning English as a foreign language. Third, it supports the development of inclusive classroom communication strategies for students with diverse language proficiency backgrounds. Without empirical data on students' perception, teachers risk implementing instructional approaches that are not aligned with students' cognitive needs, which may ultimately lead to a decline in students' interest in learning English.

2. Method

The study used a descriptive qualitative method in order to meet the objective of the research which focused on students' perception towards teacher's bilingual language use and its benefit. It was conducted at a senior high school in Cililin, West Bandung Regency. This school was selected due to its status as a public secondary school in rural area context where English is taught as a foreign language. It was held on specific class which is Bahasa class in which the English teacher used bilingual approach in teaching English in ELL classroom. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants, ensuring that the students (10 students in grade 12 involved) were in

Bahasa class, they consisted of students with any level of proficiency in English, also they were non-native speaker and their daily communication language is Indonesian and Sundanese.

Data were collected through questionnaire which was close-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview. In order to avoid misunderstanding of the participants in understanding the aims of each statement, before the questionnaire was delivered to the participants, the questionnaire items were adopted and translated into Indonesian language. Then, the data from the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating and reading the data. There were eight statements in the questionnaire items which were used to categorize students' perception of teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom. Students answered the list of the statements by giving check (✓) whether they agree or disagree to the statements. The data from questionnaire were used to figure out the students' perception of teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom and classified whether their perception is positive or negative. Besides, semi-structured interview's questions were systematically listed and directly answered by the interviewee. For consistency and reliability purposes, each student was asked the same questions, using the same wording, yet the only differentiation was in following up questions that were used to clarify interviewee responses. The interview session was recorded in order to support the study to obtain the data.

Data from questionnaire were analyzed using Likert Scale, in which students' answer would be classified into percentage data and it was used to present the data from questionnaire to be classified and interpreted easily. The questionnaire was given to the participants at the end of the course. It was given in the participants' class, and they returned it when they were finished. The participants were given approximately 30 minutes of the class time to complete the questionnaire. They were allowed to ask and answer the questionnaire items in their first language since their English might not be fully developed enough to express their thoughts. Then, a bilingual speaker of English and Indonesian translated the participants' answers.

3. Result

Regarding to research question which was attempted to find out students' perception of teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom, the study found that students generally had a positive view of teacher's bilingual language use in their ELL classroom. This result was supported by looking at the data gained from the questionnaire as shown by the following table. The table below showed the percentage of the questionnaire that filled by the students.

SA = Strongly Agree

DA = Disagree

A = Agree

SDA = Strongly Disagree

N = Neutral

Table 1. The Calculation of Each Statement in Questionnaire

No	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
1	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom helps you in learning English	7.14%	57.14%	28.58%	7.14%	0%
2	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you easy to understand the material given by the teacher	21.43%	64.29%	14.28%	0%	0%
3	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you easy to understand new vocabularies in English	21.43%	57.15%	14.28%	7.14%	0%
4	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom helps you to be fluent and accurate on your English speaking skill	14.29%	14.29%	57.14%	7.14%	7.14%
5	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you develop and easy in English writing skill	14.29%	14.29%	50%	21.43%	0%
6	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes your listening skill develop and	7.14%	50%	28.57%	7.14%	7.14%

understand toward the meaning of every sentence which is explained by the teacher						
7	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you understand something faster and it helps your teacher in managing the time in explaining thing	28.57%	42.86%	28.57%	0%	0%
8	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you confused to learn English	7.14%	21.43%	42.86%	28.57%	0%
Total		15.2%	40.1%	33%	9.9%	1.8%

The results from the questionnaire showed that out of eight statements asked in questionnaire, the students gave their agreement positively to the all statements. Students gave positive response of total 40.1% by answering “agree” and just gave negative response of 1.8% by answering “strongly disagree” to all statements in the questionnaire. Students also mostly answered “agree” and “neutral” on the second until seventh elements discussed about advantages of teacher’s bilingual language use in ELL classroom.

Based on statement number 1, it revealed that students had strong positive perception to teacher’s bilingual language use in their ELL classroom by 57.14% agreed to the statement that the use of Indonesian language in ELL classroom by the teacher helps them in learning English.

As mentioned by participant 4:

“Kalau misalnya guru ngejelasin materi bahasa Inggris terus dijelasin lagi pakai bahasa Indonesia itu pasti lebih membantu kita (siswa) buat belajar bahasa Inggris.”

Students would be more understand if the teacher use both English and Indonesian language to explain the English material.

Statement number 2 reached the highest percentage of agree by 64.29% stated that the use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes students easy to understand the material given by the teacher. It was supported with the statement of participant 3:

“Jika guru menerangkan (materi) memakai bahasa Indonesia itu sangat membantu, apalagi pada siswa yang pemula belajar bahasa Inggris. Kan setiap siswa itu beda-beda ya, ada yang ngerti banget, ada yang biasa, ada yang kurang ngerti. Jadi, emang membantu sih menurut saya.”

The use of bilingual language in English classroom would support students’ comprehension in any level of proficiency.

Based on the statements number 3-6, students gave positive responses by answering agree and neutral of the use of Indonesian language helps them to develop their English skill such as speaking, reading, listening and writing. One of the students who agreed was participant 6, as she said:

“Dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris menurut saya perlu diimbangi dengan penggunaan bahasa Indonesia supaya apa yang disampaikan guru bisa tersampaikan dengan jelas pada siswanya. Terus, membantu skill berbahasa Inggris karena jika disampaikan dengan bahasa Indonesia maka para siswa akan mudah mengerti dan dapat mempraktekannya dengan benar.”

The student stated that the use of bilingual language could help students develop their English skill because they can practice English easily and correctly.

However, there were also students who disagreed of the use of bilingual language could help and develop students’ English skill. As mentioned by participant 10:

“Murid bisa terbantu sedikitnya kalau guru menggunakan bahasa Indonesia, tapi menurut saya untuk kemajuan skill-nya lebih baik dilatih menggunakan bahasa Inggris agar siswanya terbiasa, kalau bahasa Indonesia terus-menerus sepertinya kurang berkembang.”

The use of Indonesian language by the teacher did help students in English lesson, yet for the English skills progress, it was better to practice them only using English as a result students could get used to it. The role of Indonesian language was not very influential in the progress of English skill.

Furthermore, in the last statement, students answered neutral (42.86%) in the statement that the use of Indonesian language by the teacher in ELL classroom make students confused to learn English. It could be concluded that students dealt with the use of Indonesian language in ELL classroom could help them more

comprehended in English lesson and avoid misunderstood in explaining English material to the students (participant 1).

Based on the questionnaire and interview result, students perceived that the use of bilingual language helped them to be more easily understood the English lesson. Besides, it helped students who lacked of English lesson to stick out the English material presented by the teacher (participant 3). The use of bilingual language also enriched students' vocabularies since when teacher delivered something then it was translated into Indonesian language, students would know the meaning of the vocabularies that students were not familiar before (participant 4).

Participant 6 also added, "*Kalau guru juga menggunakan bahasa Indonesia, itu memudahkan siswanya untuk mengerti atau memahami apa yang dijelaskan oleh gurunya. Karena, ada guru yang menggunakan bahasa Inggris dengan pelafalan yang cepat sehingga sulit untuk dimengerti, pemilihan katanya juga sulit dimengerti dan membuat siswa jadi bingung.*" Teacher's pronunciation and choice of English words also affect students' understanding of English material.

Speaking of benefits of bilingual language instruction used by the teacher, based on interview session result, students stated that there were some benefits of teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom. The first point is making students easy to understand what the teacher explained in English lesson. As stated by participant 7:

"Karena dengan cara itu (bilingual language), siswa bisa lebih paham dan mengerti bahasa Inggris. Karena, tidak sedikit siswa yang paham bahkan mengerti jika gurunya terus-terusan berbicara bahasa Inggris."

Students would easily understand the material if the teacher used bilingual language as language instruction in ELL classroom.

Bilingual language used by the teacher also made students easy to understand new vocabularies in English. If the teacher gave the students an example of sentences and then translated it into Indonesian language, students would find out new vocabulary and its meaning (participant 4). Students felt that the use of bilingual language in ELL classroom by the teacher helped them to do the exercises. Participant 8 conveyed:

"Misalnya dalam memberikan tugas/latihan jika guru full menggunakan bahasa Inggris, siswa seringkali tidak paham apa tugasnya. Jadi, bila guru menggunakan bahasa Indonesia siswa akan bisa paham."

In doing the exercises given by the teacher, students often did not understand about the instruction. Therefore, many students ended up lazy or misunderstood in doing the exercises given by the teacher.

The last benefit of bilingual language use for students was helping them to ask and answer something during in the class. Participant 10 stated:

"Itu (bilingual language) bisa membantu berkomunikasi dengan guru seperti tanya jawab."

Participant 4 also added:

"Kan kadang kalau misalnya di sekolah tub suka ada murid yang gak tahu tapi males nanya."

It could not be denied that most students felt embarrassed, afraid to make mistakes and had difficulty communicating with the teacher in English, thus one way to make their communication ran well was by using bilingual language in order that students became feel free to ask and answer something to the teacher.

Nonetheless, students also argued that English exposure in ELL classroom must be existed. As mentioned by participant 10:

"Harus seimbang antara bahasa Inggris-nya juga biar siswa akhirnya lebih terbiasa di kelas dan bisa berkembang dalam segi skillnya karena itu kan harus dilatih ya."

The use of English language had a good impact in increasing students' English skill since students need to practice English language in case that it was not commonly used in their daily communication so that they were used to it by practicing language in school, especially in the class.

4. Discussion

Based on the research findings, it could be indicated that students gave positive perspective toward teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom. While, speaking of the benefits, there were some benefits of teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom, namely making students easy to understand what the teacher explained in English lesson, making students easy to understand new vocabularies in English, helping students to do exercises and helping students to ask and answer something during the class. Students gave positive agreement toward the use of Indonesian language by the teacher in ELL classroom to help them in learning English. As stated by Kelilo

(2012) that English learners need the existence of their native language to understand the logic and organizational principles of the target language and also to help them in understanding new language.

In the first statement, the use of Indonesian language by the teacher in ELL classroom helped students in learning English, none of the students who strongly disagree with the statement and just 7.14% (one student) who answered disagree. The data proved that students gave positive agreement to the first statement. Likewise, with the statement number 2, the students had the highest percentage by answering 64.29% agree and 21.34% strongly agree with the bilingual language used by the teacher made the students easy to understand the material given by the teacher which showed that students also had positive perception toward the teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom.

The second until seventh statements declared about the advantages of the teacher's bilingual language use which mostly students agreed of each statement. The last statement had 42.86% of neutral and 28.57% of disagreed answer, yet it did not show negative perceptions because actually the statement was in a form of negative statement which showed that the students still gave a positive perception by showing that the use of Indonesian language by the teacher in ELL classroom did not make them confused to learn English.

The result of interview revealed that the participants gave a good or positive perception toward the teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom. The students pointed out that bilingual language was necessary to be applied in ELL classroom. Their reasons for agreeing to the statements were varied. Some of the reasons were (1) they agreed that with the use of bilingual language used by the teacher during teaching-learning process in the class because not all students could understand directly what the teacher explained in English only, (2) It would be easier for students to understand the meaning in Indonesian language when they were informed a new vocabulary given by the teacher, (3) Students thought that the teacher's bilingual language use in their ELL classroom could help students to ask and answer something to the teacher.

Furthermore, referring to the benefits of teacher's bilingual language use in ELL classroom, based on the data findings, this study revealed that teacher's bilingual language use gave several benefits for the students in learning English. Based on the interview result, students declared that there were four benefits of bilingual language instruction used by the teacher. The benefits were making students easy to understand what the teacher explained in English lesson, helping students to do exercises, and helping students to ask and answer something during in the class. It is in line with Kelilo (2012) stated that students' native language use in foreign language classroom played pedagogical value. The last benefit was making students easy to understand new vocabularies in English which was in line with Bouangeune's (2009) statement that the role of native language could help students to focus on their attention to the vocabularies and grammatical items of target language.

In addition, students need to get more exposure of English language to increase their English skill (speaking, reading, listening, writing) because students could only practice it at school. That statement related to the research conducted by Tsukamoto (2011) argued that students were pleased to practice their speaking and develop their listening skill with some exposure of English of which the intention was to increase exposure to the target language. Nonetheless, bilingual language did not help that much with students' improvement in English skill.

5. Conclusion

From the result of the study, it can be concluded that students showed positive perception towards the use of bilingual teacher's language as language instruction in ELL classroom. The students stated that bilingual language was necessary to be applied in the classroom. They agreed because not all students understand English language thus they need it to be completed with Indonesian language to help them in finding and understanding new vocabularies, to understand materials conveyed by the teacher and to communicate within asking and answering question with the teachers became easily.

Speaking of the benefits of teacher's bilingual language use for students in English language learning, the study revealed that teacher's bilingual language use gave some benefits for the students in learning English. There were four benefits of bilingual language instruction used by the teacher: making students easy to understand what teacher explained in English lesson, making students easy to understand new vocabularies, helping students to do exercises, and helping students to ask and answering question during the class.

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