

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHER'S BILINGUAL LANGUAGE USE IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate the perception of students toward the use of two languages of instruction (English and Indonesian) by the teacher in an English classroom and to find out its benefits for students in learning English. This study employed qualitative approach as a basic framework of study with a case study method. The participants of this study were 50 students of 7<sup>th</sup> grade at a junior high school in Bandung Regency. The data from questionnaire were analysed based on Likert scale by Ockert (2005) for investigating students' perception and semi-structured interview by Fraenkel and Wallen (2012) for finding the benefits of teacher's bilingual language use for students in learning English. This study reveals that (1) students show their positive perceptions to the use of bilingual language done by the teacher as language instruction in their English classroom; (2) 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, feel comfortable during the class, easy to understand new vocabularies in English, help them to do exercises, help them to ask and answer something during the class, and help them to read something in English correctly. Hopefully, the findings would give a great contribution to the enrichment of the best classroom language instruction should be used by the teacher in an English language learning classroom especially for teaching the students at low level of English proficiency and where English is existed as a foreign language (EFL).

**Keywords:** *bilingual approach, students' perception, two languages instruction, teacher's language use, EFL classroom*

### Introduction

The need of an understandable language instruction is very important in learning a new language because if the students do not feel clear enough about what teacher gives or explains to them of the target language, they will not get any kind of information from the teacher during the learning process and hence they might be failed in the learning process. In Indonesian context, English is seen as a foreign language (EFL) in which it is not

widely used by learners in their immediate social context (Saville-troike, 2006, p. 4), it includes in school area where the students learn English as a leaning subject, the students rarely use English as their language for communication or interaction with others and they tend to use Indonesian language or their local language to communicate each other inside or outside the classroom.

The condition mentioned before influences the language use by the teacher in order to conduct an English language learning (ELL) classroom; teachers may incorporate Indonesian language in ELL classroom for conducting the class especially to teach the students in the beginning level of English language proficiency in which at this level the students do not have much knowledge about English. The condition mentioned before also leads to the argument of Brown (2001, p. 98) which states that teaching students at beginning level is seen as the most challenging level of language instruction, because at this level students only have little or even do not have prior knowledge of the target language. Besides, Brown (2001) also argues that beginning students are highly dependent on the teacher for models of language (p. 99). Thus, incorporating students' first language (in this study: Indonesian language) could be considered as a learning tool to facilitate the students to learn English.

In line with the arguments mentioned above, Brown (2001, p. 99) believes that the use of students' first language (L1) in foreign language classroom situations is becoming an option, as long as it is limited by the need of the first language itself and gives some

distinct advantages in learning the target language (L2).

In addition, Nazary (2008, p. 138) also says that it is common for EFL teachers to use the students' mother tongue as a tool for conveying meaning as a means of interaction both in English language institutes and in the classroom. Existing students' native language in an EFL classroom will influence the classroom dynamic and suggestions, because L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' live experiences, allowing them to express themselves (Schweers, 1999, p. 7).

In accordance with the previous statements, as stated by Brown (2000) teachers and educators have debated whether or not they use the students' first language (L1) in an EFL classroom. Some teachers may think that teaching foreign language to students and bringing their L1 to take a part in the learning process may be effective for them to learn the foreign language, especially for the students in the low level proficiency of English because allowing students to be close to their native speaker will help them to learn and to acquire a new language (Cook, 2001a, p. 171-172).

Moreover, to be proficient in a new language acquisition, someone should have basic knowledge of the new language. As stated by Saville-Troike (2006, p. 18) 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. That prior knowledge helps them to develop their second language acquisition and act as a tool to be proficient in that target language or second language (L2) learning process.

On the other hand, in Indonesian context, there is also no regulation or education institution policy for the use of language instruction in order to conduct an English language learning (ELL). Language instruction in ELL classroom is only determined by the teachers who teach English as the learning subject. Teachers only determine the language use based on their belief or their used approach to language learning.

Furthermore, in order to determine the language use for conducting their ELL classroom, teachers actually have two kinds of language instruction alternative; whether to use (1) English only or (2) English is incorporated with Indonesian language or students' first language (L1). The classification of language instruction is in line with the report of U.S Department of Education (2012), it is report that there are two kinds of language instruction for conducting an English language learning classroom—

English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual approaches. The use of those approaches or language instructions should be based on some factors such as age, formal education background or L1 literacy because it is believed that there is no one approach or model is appropriate for all English learners (U.S Department of Education, 2012, p. xxii).

In order to deal with the condition and situation mentioned above, the use of bilingual approach in English language learning (ELL) classroom especially for teaching English to the students in low level English proficiency is needed to be investigated. Regarding this, this study would like to investigate the perception of students toward the use of Indonesian in ELL classroom and to find out whether or not incorporating Indonesian in ELL classroom gives benefits for students in learning English. Bilingual approach in this study leads to the use of students' first language (Indonesian) in learning target language (in this study it is due to learn English). Moreover, the term of teacher's bilingual language use in this study is defined as two languages of classroom instruction that used by the teacher in teaching English (the implementation of Indonesian and English in teaching English to the beginning level of students).

## Literature Review

- **Concept of Perception**

According to Mussen (1973) defines perception as the process of how the information is acquired through the sensory receptors (e.g. eyes, ears, nose, and skin) which is transformed into a perception of what we think, see, hear, smell, taste, or touch. It is in line with the statement of Cherry (n.d) that perception involves human's five senses; there are hear, smell, taste, touch, and sight. Moreover, Kumar (2010) explains the concept of perception in perspective of philosophy, psychology, and the cognitive sciences that "perception is the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information". Furthermore, he also defines that perception is the process of selection, organization, and interpretation of stimuli by someone to be a coherent and meaningful picture of the world. In other words, by passing perceptual process, people can interpret their idea meaningfully based on what they see, hear, taste, smell, and touch.

In addition, Walgito (2001) states that perception which is begun by the process of feeling, of measuring something which is also the process of accepting stimuli by individuals through sense organs or it is also called sensory process. Besides, she also mentions that perception is defined as an integrated process in every

individual to the received stimuli (Mozkowitz and Orgel, 1969; Walgito, 2001; Handini, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that perception is the process of stimuli receiving from someone through sensory receptors and producing it to become a meaningful thing either idea or picture of something.

Furthermore, According to Harnad (1987), there are two aspects of perception. The first aspect is cognitive. This aspect emphasizes on understanding and making sense of things. It includes reasoning, arguments, logic and perception. Cognitive aspect can be examined by seeing the results of how emotion, experience, and intelligence contribute to the understanding and responses. Meanwhile, the second aspect is psychology aspect. Harnad (1987) also mentions that in psychology aspect, it only focuses on the relation of experience that influences stimulation, and then the result of it affects the perception itself. In addition, Handini (2014) says that those aspects have role in determining and affecting someone's perception.

There are also some factors that influence someone's perception; it includes internal and external factors. For internal factor, the perception of an individual will influenced by psychological factor of someone, thought,

feeling, motivation, and attention. On the other hand, for the external factor it influenced by outside factors such as stimulus, environment, culture, and believe (Walgito, 2001). It is in line with the statement of Sobur (2003), which argues that there are two factors that influence someone's perception. There are internal and external factors. Internal factor includes psychological needs, personal background, experience, personality, attitude and personal believe, and self acceptance. Furthermore, for external factor, he argues that it includes intensity, size, contrast, movement, repetition, intimacy, and novelty.

- **Bilingual Approach in English Language Learning**

Generally, bilingual approach in this study refers to the use of students' first language (L1) in learning target language (in this case learning English). Hence, teacher's bilingual language use in this study is defined as two languages of classroom instruction used by the teacher in teaching English, or it is also meant incorporating the students' native language (L1) in English language learning (ELL) classroom as a learning tool (Dujmović, 2007). In this study, it is the application of Indonesian (L1) and English (L2) in teaching English to the beginning level of students. According to McGroarty (in

Celce-Murcia, 2005, p. 345) in her material which is entitled 'Bilingual Approach to Language Learning', she clearly explains what the bilingual approach is. It is noted that bilingual approach is applied in the similar group of students where two languages (or more) are used as a language instruction in learning a language subject. In other words, bilingual approach applies two or more languages classroom instruction as media in learning second language or foreign language in which it is applied in a class where the students have similar language.

In accordance with the statement above, based on the argument of some experts in book report of U.S. Department of Education Center No ED-CFO-10-A-0030/0001 (2012, p. ix), they argue that bilingual approach is aimed to educate the English learners in which it is built by belief that students' first language (L1) skills contribute positively to students' acquisition of a second language (L2) and it also believes that students' first language instruction does appear to promote gains in English achievement (Thomas and Collier, 2002; August and Shanahan, 2008; Genesee et al., 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Ramirez, Yuen, and Ramey, 1991). Furthermore, the definition of the bilingual approach above is in accordance with the Indonesian context in which English is

existed as a foreign language and where the students study English as a learning subject. In Indonesia, the term of bilingual approach is commonly known as the use of students' first language (L1) in second or foreign language learning. Both definitions are similar, because whether bilingual approach and L1 use are as similar as the concept of bilingual approach itself.

- **The Roles of Students' First Language (L1) in EFL Classrooms**

Since foreign language classroom is defined as a multilingual setting and in which multilingual communication is bound to take place (Miettinen, 2009, p.6) in which it also includes bilingualism (Saville-troike, 2006, p.4), the brief discussion should be conducted for enriching the literature of the present study. Regarding to the role of L1 in an EFL classroom, there are several professionals who describe some roles of students' native language (L1) in an English learning field. According to Dujmović (2007, p. 94-95), there are seven roles of incorporating students' native language in English learning. It could be summarised as follows.

- Preventing time being wasted on tortuous explanations and instructions.

- Pointing out problem areas of grammar, false cognates, or etc. contrastively.
- Promoting students' receptive competence (their understanding) by allowing them to respond something using their L1.
- Allowing the teacher to get know the students as people or making the teacher easy to explain something to the students, especially for beginners in pre-lesson small talk activity during the class in which it affects to decrease students' tense.
- Helping both students and teacher to say something difficult by rephrasing and simplifying it.
- Helping students to check their comprehension of lexical explanations by having a bilingual dictionary in the classroom when the teacher does not speak their (students) language.
- Accommodating students who need to combine the two languages, e.g. someone whose job involves translating and interpreting.

Moreover, there are also three roles of students' native language (L1) in English as a foreign language classroom which are argued by Kelilo (2012). There are three roles of L1 in EFL classroom that argued by Kelilo (2012); it includes pedagogical role, psychological role, and socio-cultural role.

In pedagogical role, it is believed that students' native language (L1) use in foreign language classroom plays pedagogical value. Actually, it creates support for students in learning English. English learners need the existence of their native language (L1) to understand the logic and organizational principles of the target language and also to help them in understanding the new language. On the other hand, it can be said that L1 becomes the prior knowledge for learning the new language.

Moreover, in psychological role, Kelilo (2012, 27) believes that students' native language (L1) makes students feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts and feel free to do something in class. It also confirms Auerbach's (1993) statement which states that students' native language use in the foreign language classroom reduces the psychological barriers of English learning and gives significant progression (in Kelilo, 2012).

Meanwhile, in socio-cultural role the use of L1 relates the atmosphere of L2 classroom with the culture of the students. Therefore, the students will learn the L2 in the authentic environment and it helps the teacher in designing L2 classroom activities. It is also believed that incorporating students' first language in L2 classroom creates socio-cultural role in which students' culture and English

learning situation are linked by it. Students would be better in learning a new language if there is a link of students' culture and the target language itself. It creates learning environment exists in natural settings.

- **The Reasons for Students' L1 Use in EFL Classroom**

According to the result of some studies carried out by Atkinson (1987), Schweers (1999), and Nation (2003), based on statement of Bouangeune (2009) the result of those three researchers is due to seven reasons of the use of students' first language as a tool in language learning classroom; having communication in students' first language in a L2 classroom is more natural, especially for those who have similar native language, incorporating students' L1 in L2 classroom is more effective and easier for both students and teacher in communication during the class, the existence of students' native language in L2 classroom helps the teacher in managing the task and helps the teacher to move the task includes establishing joint understanding of text, the use of students' native language (L1) will help teacher to facilitate classroom activities, especially in delivering a complex task, it also helps students to focus their attention to the vocabularies and grammatical items of the target

language, students' native language creates a foundation for the learners especially in target language structures, and it is believed that L1 use in L2 classroom provides a sense of security, validates students' live experience, and allows them in expressing themselves.

Moreover, Tsukamoto (2011) also argues that there are three reasons for bilingual approach: to maintain a comfortable classroom atmosphere, to promote the students' comprehension and to use the class-time efficiently. In line with that statement, Polio and Duff (1994) also state that the use of L1 is useful for creating a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom. Besides, in the way of promoting student' comprehension of language, Auerbach (cited in Tsukamoto, 2011) in her research has found that the use of L1 had a successful effect in lowering the students' anxiety levels and other affective barriers for students. Finally, Atkinson (1987) proposes that the most frequent justification given by teachers for L1 use is that time saved by communicating in the mother tongue can be used for more productive activities.

- **Arguments against Students' First Language Use in EFL Classroom**

Apart from the discussion about the support of bilingual approach, it also needs a discussion about the arguments against bilingual approach itself. The contrary of bilingual approach is monolingual approach. This approach refers to the use of target language only in conducting a foreign language classroom. This approach demands both the teacher and students to use target language (L2) in whole activities in the classroom. According to Tsukamoto (2011, p. 146) the main reason that the supporters for a monolingual approach raise is the exposure to the target language (Krashen, 1987; Turnbull, 2001). The more exposure to the target language is convinced the faster students in mastering the target language. The use of L1 in learning target language is seen as something disapproved because it is convinced as an impediment of target language development. First language use is also seen as a deletion factor of an integral part of language learning and there is no pedagogical value of using it in language learning (Burden, 2000; Macaro, 1997; Tsukamoto, 2011).

According to Cook (2001), there are three important points for the reason of distancing the use of L1 in L2 classroom: 1) in learning L2, the L2 should be treated as learning the L1 in terms of exposure and attention. 2) To be successful in L2



learning, it should be separated between the L1 and L2. 3) L2 should be felt important by the students by using it continuously. It indicates that there is no place for L1 use in learning L2 or to be acquired the target language. Even it is seen as a 'useless' of using L1 in teaching or learning English, this should be considered that students in an EFL environment, especially in Indonesia do not have much exposure to the target language, especially for Indonesian students who rarely use English for communicating in their daily life, in which they are exposed to English only in the classroom where they study. Moreover, the use of their local language and Indonesian language as their first language are totally dominating. But again, Indonesian people assess English as a foreign language, thus, the use of Indonesian language in English classroom may arise depending on some factors that are considered by the teacher in teaching English as a foreign language.

### **Methodology**

In order to deal with the purpose of the present study, qualitative approach (Creswell, 2009) with case study method (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2009) was used as a basic framework for this study.

- **Participants**

50 students of 7<sup>th</sup> grade at a junior high school in Bandung Regency, West Java, Indonesia were involved in questionnaire as the participants of this study and there were only 9 students who involved in interview session.

- **Data Collection**

Since the study employed case study method, this study employed questionnaire and interview with the students in order to collect the data (Phelas et al., 2011). A questionnaire was given to the students who belong to the selected English classroom. The data from the questionnaire was aimed to find out the students' perception of teacher's bilingual language use and semi-structure interview was used to source in depth the data about the benefits of teacher's bilingual language use for students in learning English, it was also used to enrich the data collected from the questionnaire.

- **Data Analysis**

The data gained from questionnaire were analysed and explored by using some steps based on Likert scale (Ockert, 2005) for helping the researcher classify and interpret it easily to be counted and classified whether the students agree or disagree about the teacher's bilingual language use in an English classroom.

Moreover, the interview session was recorded to help researcher easy to carry out the data to be analysed further and it was transcribed and interpreted to answer the second research question which deals with the benefits of teacher's bilingual language use for students in learning

English. It was also used to strengthen and enrich the data gathered from questionnaire.

**Data Presentation and Discussion**

- **Data from Questionnaire**

**The Calculation of Central Tendency of every Statement in Questionnaire**

No	Statements	Central Tendency	Interpretation
1	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom helps you in learning English.	83%	Very strong
2	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you easy to understand the material given by the teacher.	80%	Strong
3	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you easy to understand new vocabularies in English.	77%	Strong
4	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom helps you to be fluent and accurate on your English speaking skill.	77%	Strong
5	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you easy in English writing skill.	73%	Strong
6	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you understand toward the meaning of every sentence which is explained by the teacher.	80%	Strong
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.	71%	Strong
8	The use of Indonesian language by the teacher in English classroom makes you confused to learn English.	47%	Enough

The analysis result of data from questionnaire were based on the theory of perception (Kumar, 2010; Harnad, 1987), bilingual approach (Mcgroarty in Celce-Murcia, 2005; Brown, 2001; Saville-Troike, 2006), the roles and reasons of L1 use in EFL classroom (Dujmović, 2007;

Kelilo, 2012; Auerbach, 1993; Atkinson, 1987; Schweers, 1999; Bouangeune, 2009; Tsukamoto, 2011).

Regarding to the first research question which was aimed to investigate students' perceptions toward teacher's bilingual language use in English

classroom, this study revealed that students showed their positive perception to the use of bilingual teacher's language as language instruction in their English classroom, it is in line with the study conducted by Krashen (1987) and Kelilo (2012). This finding had been supported by the analysis of the data gained from the questionnaire and the interview. The data from questionnaire had shown that from eight statements in the questionnaire, the students gave their agreement positively to all the statements in the questionnaire. Based on the statement number 1, it could be revealed that students had strong positive perception to teacher's bilingual language use in their English classroom. It was proven by the amount of central tendency of this statement which reached 83% and it indicated that they had very strong perception on the use of bilingual language used by the teacher in English classroom. In addition, it was also supported by the total vote of the students, in which no one of students answered disagree or strongly disagree to the first statement (68% agreed and 32% strongly agreed).

Moreover, the data from the questionnaire also showed that students

gave their strong positive perception toward the use of bilingual teacher's language instruction in their English classroom. It was shown by six statements (statements number 2-7) in the questionnaire responded by the students. Those six statements reached more than 70% of central tendencies which indicated that students had strong and positive perception toward those statements which stated about the advantages of teacher's bilingual language use in English classroom.

Even on another side, the last statement reached the central tendency in the level of 'enough' (it was 47%). Actually, it was a good result and it could be classified as a supporting statement for the first statement which indicated that students really had positive perception toward teacher's bilingual language use, because the last statement stated about the lack of bilingual approach. Regarding this statement, students mostly responded disagree with the statement (50% of students responded disagree and 34% of students responded strongly disagree). From the result of statement number 8, the researcher concluded that more than a half of students (it was 42 students) were strongly agree that the use of bilingual

language by their teacher was not making them confused in understanding English lesson (see: statement no. 8 on questionnaire). Therefore, to sum up the result of the data gained from the questionnaire, the researcher concluded that the students had positive perception toward teacher's bilingual language use in English classroom.

- **Data from Interview**

In finding the answer of the first research question, the findings from the questionnaire were also supported by the data from interview in order to strengthen the students' perception of teacher's bilingual language use. The questions in interview session are mentioned below.

1. Why do you agree that bilingual language used by the teacher in your English classroom helps you in learning English?
2. Why do you agree that the use of bilingual language by the teacher in your English classroom make you easy in understanding the material given by the teacher?
3. Does teacher's bilingual language use in your English classroom give some benefits for you in learning English?

4. Does teacher's bilingual language use in your English classroom help you to improve your English skills (writing, speaking, reading, and listening)? Which English skills that is very helped by it?
5. Have you ever felt that the use of bilingual language by the teacher makes you confused in learning English?
6. As the conclusion, do you agree or disagree with teacher's bilingual language use in your English classroom?

Based on the data gained from some questions in the interview, it showed that students' responses to the use of bilingual language by the teacher were positive with stating that bilingual language was necessary to be applied in English classroom (Dujmović, 2007; Kelilo, 2012; Auerbach, 1993; Atkinson, 1987; Schweers, 1999; Bouangeune, 2009; Tsukamoto, 2011). The reasons for their agreements of their perception to the use of bilingual language were varied based on what they felt, thought, and experienced (Kumar, 2010; Harnad, 1987). In the other hand, the following explanation will be directed to answer the second research question. The second

research question was aimed to find out the benefits of teacher's bilingual language use for students in learning English. Based on the data findings and discussions, this study revealed that teacher's bilingual language use gave some benefits for the students in learning English. Based on the result of the interview session, students stated that there were six benefits of bilingual language instruction used by the teacher. The benefits were:

- Making them easy to understand what the teacher explained in English lesson.
- Making them felt comfortable during the class.

### **Conclusions**

The finding of this study reveals that teacher's bilingual language use is implemented at one junior high school in Bandung Regency, West Java, Indonesia in order to teach English to the students who are in the beginning level of English proficiency. The implementation of teacher's bilingual language use was based on bilingual approach in English language learning in which the students' first language (L1) is combined with the target language (L2) being studied to be a

- Making them easy to understand new vocabularies in English.
- Helping them to do exercises.
- Helping them to ask and answer something during the class.
- Helping them to read something in English correctly.

In addition, the use of bilingual teacher's language instruction also increased four English skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking).

However, writing skill was felt becoming the skill which was very helped by the application of teacher's bilingual language use in the English classroom.

language instruction used by the teacher to conduct an English classroom.

Regarding the result of this study that was based on the result of data analysis and interpretation of the data gained from questionnaire and interview, it indicates that students show their positive perceptions to the use of bilingual language done by the teacher as language instruction in their English classroom which is proved by the central tendency of seven statements in questionnaire reach more than 70% and the last statement which reaches 47% of

central tendency. However even the last statement reached the central tendency in the level "enough", actually it was good result and it could be classified as a supporting statement for the first statement which indicated that students really had positive perception toward teacher's bilingual language use, because the last statement stated about the contradiction of the first statement. Furthermore, there are also 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, feel comfortable during the class, easy to understand new vocabularies in English, help them to do exercises, help them to ask and answer something during the class, and help them to read something in English correctly.

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