STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF FIRST LANGUAGE USAGE IN EFL CLASSROOM: A CASE OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study investigated students' perceptions, students' attitudes, and students' main reasons for supporting first language use in the EFL classroom. A qualitative approach with a holistic-single case study design was applied, and the instruments were a Questionnaire and interview session. The participants were 22 students of grade XI from the Social Program at the MAN 1 Indramayu. The participants answered questions administered through 29 questionnaire statements and eight interview questions. The result showed that (1) the students rarely speak English during English learning in the EFL classroom, (2) The students strongly agree if the teacher uses First Language (L1) when explaining something complicated, like grammar or unfamiliar vocabulary. (3) The students’ main reason that the students did not understand and still have doubts about some vocabulary. The interview result indicated that first Language (L1) is still needed in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: Perception, first Language, senior high school

INTRODUCTION

Learning new language in a classroom is difficult for the students when the students do not understand what the teacher is explaining about. That is why 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 (Azimov, 2020 : 51). In an introductory English skill case, most of the students did not understand of teacher's explanation because teacher speaks only English without considering the other students who have little knowledge of English. It was supported by Harbord (1992), who points out that many ELT teachers have tried to
create English classrooms, but they have failed to get the meaning across, leading to students' incomprehension and resentment. The other teaching and learning process are students only give their attention without giving any questions to their teacher and they talk to each other or play gadgets. At the end of the class, they do not get information from the teacher about the material given in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, they might fail in the learning process. Brown & Campione (1996) states that teaching students at the secondary level is a challenging language instruction-level because students have little or have prior knowledge of the target language.

Many researchers had ever researched first language usage in the EFL Classroom to support this research. The first is Alzamil (2019), who revealed that the participants believed that their teachers used Arabic in some situations when communicating important information. The second is Wulandari (2019) found that most students gave positive perceptions of the Indonesian language as the supporting language of instruction in EFL classroom. The third is Almohaimeed & Almurshed (2018) showed that advanced learners hold a negative attitude towards the use of L1 in their English classes. In contrast, elementary and intermediate learners generally perceive the judicious use of their L1 positively. Those researchers only focused on the students' perception toward using the first language by the teacher in the EFL classroom.

Besides, controversies on incorporating the First Language (L1) in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have been a longstanding discussion in the current literature. A significant number made many arguments against the use of L1 of professional. A common perception seems to dominate educational institutions that somebody should avoid using L1 in EFL classrooms (Krashen, 1981), and many institutions have an English-only policy. This idea is often supported by the view that learning L2 (English) is strongly determined by maximum exposure to that language, so L1 should be banned from classrooms. Several researchers have criticized this perception, and a movement toward the inclusion of L1 in L2 classrooms has begun to attract attention. Atkinson (1993) says that mother tongue (L1) can enhance the students teacher interaction and it is a kind of non-natural environment for teaching if teacher only used L2 in the class when both students and teacher share a common mother tongue.

However, All these conceptions seem to be somewhat naive as there is neither a persuasive body of research nor satisfying empirical
work indicating that abandoning or allowing the use of L1 in EFL classrooms would better contribute to students’ learning of an L2.

However, students’ perceptions of the Indonesian language in the EFL Classroom are seldom to be analyzed. That is why this research curious to investigate students’ perception towards the use of the first language. Hopefully, this study helps teachers have a deeper insight into students' preference and justification of using the first language by the EFL Classroom teacher to build enjoyable interaction during the classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception

Kumar (2010) explains the concept of perception from the 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 as the process of selection, organization, and interpretation of stimuli by someone to be a coherent and meaningful picture of the world. In other words, bypassing the 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. Several different perception types are distinguished: 1) Visual perception: the perception of visual information and stimuli received through eyes. This perception is the earliest perception developing in humans and affects humans to understand their world. Visual perception is the main topic of discussion of perceptions in general and perceptions that are usually most often discussed in everyday contexts. 2) Auditory perception: the perception of information and stimuli received through the ears. Auditory perception requires a listener to detect different kinds of acoustic signals and judge differences between them according to differences in acoustic characteristics such as frequency, amplitude, duration, order of occurrence, and presentation rate. 3) Speech
perception: the understanding or comprehension of speech. Based on the explanation above, the authors can conclude that perception is an interpretation, judgment, or opinion of someone about an object. The purpose of the perception itself is to help humans recognize and understand how the conditions were.

**First Language**

Using L1 in the English classrooms can be productive. According to Harbord (1992) Employing L1 and adds that L1 can enhance and keep the flow of communication. It means that both can use L1 in the English classroom; however, there are limitations to use it. According to Al-Nofaie (2010), some teaching methods use L1 as a helper in the English classroom. On the other side, Sharma (2006) concludes that if the students are always exposed to English, they will learn quickly; they also try to think in English because they must use it.

**Advantages of First Language**

In situations where the students' L1 was not allowed in private spaces, there were punishments for using the mother tongue. Goldstein (2003) found that students did not speak, used their L1 quietly, and felt a sense of shame when somebody punished them for using their language. Learning another language should add richness to students' lives; it should not devalue their language and culture. By allowing L1 use, students would get the sense that learning another language is a positive experience because they can access a valuable resource that supports them. They do not have to feel guilty for doing what comes naturally.

Various studies (Anggrahini, 2019; Hasrina, Aziz & Fitriani, 2018; and Parde, 2018) have revealed that the English learning process's first language has some advantages and disadvantages students. Some of the benefits are as follows.

a. The use of First Language (L1) helps the students in speaking. When students say and forget the words to use, switching the needed words from Indonesian can help them express their meaning.
b. First Language (L1) use helps students in understanding the teacher’s explanation. Since most classes have limited time, explaining complex concepts using First Language (L1) seems to be the most efficient and realistic way.

c. The use of First Language (L1) helps students' comprehension of vocabulary. Learning complex vocabulary, e.g., abstract words, can be made easier using First Language (L1).

**English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

According to Harmer (2007) EFL as the teaching of English where the students are studying English in their own country or are engaged in short courses in English-speaking countries such as the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, Ireland, or New Zealand. Gebhard (2006) also defined EFL can be defined as the study of English by people who live in places in which English is not used as a means of first language communication. Therefore, EFL is term where English is not native language.

In the study of EFL contexts, some cultural aspects in the target language may not be naturally acquired (Brown, 2001; Cotteral and Cohen, 2003). EFL is taught in many countries as a foreign language such as Japan, Morroco and Thailand (Brown, 2001), Italy, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam and so is Arabic (Gebhard, 2006).

**The Use of First Language in EFL Classroom**

Most practitioners believe it can help students to use the class limited time efficiently with productive or communicative activities (Atkinson, in Miles 2004). Thus, the interference of using the first language can help students to use valuable class time efficiently. For the students, the use of the first language can help them find a new word in the target language. Swain & Lapkin (1998) stated that a first language can assist in the comprehension and memorization of the target language vocabulary. Also, the use of the first language in the classroom as a translation technique can evade misleading because first language translation usually provides the necessary qualities (i.e., clear, short, and familiar) that are very important in effective definitions.
Besides, for Indonesian students, First Language (L1) is the first language which is used since childhood. Besides as the national language, First Language (L1) is also used as the medium of instruction in educational institutions at all levels. Thus, it seems quite acceptable to use it as the language of instruction intended to facilitate the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Irawan (2003) underlined that teachers who use First Language (L1) get a positive result in teaching. He concluded that First Language (L1) can be recommended to be used in the English teaching and learning process.

METHOD

This research was conducted in a qualitative case study research method. Case study research involves a detailed and intensive analysis of a particular event, situation, organization, or social unit. Typically, a case has a defined space and time frame: “a phenomenon of some sort in a bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It was addressed 22 students (8 females and 13 males) of grade XI from the Social Program of MAN 1 Indramayu. The technique for selecting participants in this study was using purposive sampling. There were two kinds of instruments in this research; a questionnaire and a set of the interview. A questionnaire aims to determine the students’ perception of the teacher's first language usage in the EFL Classroom. The questionnaire contained twenty-nine statements that were categorized into three categories. And the interview was conducted to confirm the questionnaire. The questionnaire data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis divided into three processes: data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and the interview data analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

DISCUSSION

1. **First language usage in EFL classroom**
   The first category was perceptions of students regarding language use during the EFL classroom. Six questions related to language use during the EFL classroom. The score was applied to
describe the students' perception of language use during English lessons in the EFL classroom. The following was the percentage of each statement of this category:

Table 1. Students' Perception of Language Use in the EFL Classroom

| No | Language use during English lessons                                                                 | A   | O   | S   | R   | N   |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1  | How often does the teacher speak English during lessons?                                             | 27.3% | 27.3% | 22.7% | 13.6% | 9.1% |
| 2  | How often do you speak English during lessons?                                                       | 0%   | 9.1% | 31.8% | 31.8% | 27.3% |
| 3  | When you ask the teacher something, how often do you ask in English?                                 | 4.5% | 9.1% | 9.1% | 54.5% | 22.7% |
| 4  | How often do you answer the teacher in English when he asks you questions in English?                | 9.1% | 9.1% | 13.6% | 31.8% | 36.4% |
| 5  | How often do you speak English with your classmates during lessons?                                  | 0%   | 4.5% | 9.1% | 31.8% | 54.5% |
| 6  | When you have pair- or group work, how often do you speak English?                                   | 4.5% | 9.1% | 27.3% | 36.4% | 22.7% |
|    | Total                                                                                               | 8%   | 11%  | 19%  | 33%  | 29%  |

The abbreviations above stand for every answer: always (A), often (O), sometimes (S), rarely (R), and never (N)

Table 4.1 students expressed that the students used less English than the teachers during class. A finding of question number 2 shows that the students sometimes used English during the course. It means that the students include first language (L1) in the EFL classroom. Sharma (2006) maintained this finding, which conducted a study on the use of the Nepali language in Nepal’s secondary schools. It was found that the students used L1 more than the teachers did. Next, students were asked about how often they use English to their teachers and their classmate. The result shows that they sometimes used English with their teachers and their classmates. The percentage of using English to
teachers is higher than the rate of using English to their classmates. These results supported by Anton and Dicamilla (1999) stated that whether it is admitted or not, learners, especially the basic level ones, tend to use their L1 during collaborative work at various degrees to scaffold new information and understand complex concepts.

The first category concluded that the EFL classroom teacher used the agreed-to first language (L1). This is in line with Al-nofaie (2010) that investigates teachers and learners’ attitudes in an intermediate school in Jeddah. In her study, she concludes that teachers and learners agree with the positive effects of using Arabic, but they hold different perceptions regarding the purposes and functions of the L1. This result also confirms the finding of Atkinson (1993), who stated that for many learners, particularly adults and teenagers, occasional use of the L1 allows them to show intelligent and sophisticated people. Thus, the participant also mentioned that was no problem with the first language usage in the EFL classroom. Teacher’s Indonesian language use helped them increase their comprehension in the English classroom (Atkinson, 1987).

2. Students’ attitudes of first language usage in EFL classroom

The second category was attitudes toward language use during English lessons. Seventeen statements related to the students’ attitudes towards language use. The score was utilized to describe the students’ attitudes toward language use during English lessons in the EFL classroom. The following was the percentage of each statement of this category:

| No | Attitudes towards language use during English lessons | SA  | A   | N  | D  | SD  |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|----|-----|
| 7  | I think it is important that the teacher speaks only English during lessons. | 27.3% | 27.3% | 18.2% | 13.6% | 13.6% |
| 8  | I think the students should always speak English during lessons. | 18.2% | 13.6% | 18.2% | 27.3% | 22.7% |
| 9  | I think instructions for assignments | 45.5% | 18.2% | 31.8% | 0% | 45.5% |
10. I think the teacher should use First Language (L1) when he is explaining something difficult, like grammar or vocabulary. (63.6% 18.2% 13.6% 4.5% 0%)

11. I think the teacher should use First Language (L1) to discipline students. (31.8% 31.8% 27.3% 9.1% 0%)

12. I think the teacher should use First Language (L1) when he is discussing with students about something that is not class related. (45.5% 22.7% 18.2% 13.6% 0%)

13. I think the teacher should use First Language (L1) when he is assigning homework. (27.3% 22.7% 27.3% 18.2% 4.5%)

14. I think the teacher should use First Language (L1) to ask students questions. (36.4% 18.2% 22.7% 13.6% 9.1%)

15. I think the teacher should use First Language (L1) to praise or correct students. (31.8% 27.3% 22.7% 13.6% 4.5%)

16. I often do not understand what I am supposed to do because the teacher only explains in English. (54.5% 18.2% 18.2% 4.5% 4.5%)

17. It is easier to learn the language because the teacher only speaks English. (4.5% 9.1% 31.8% 22.7% 31.8%)

18. It is easier for me to speak English because I get a lot of practice at school. (13.6% 22.7% 36.4% 13.6% 13.6%)

19. I think my grammar has improved because the teacher speaks mostly English. (22.7% 22.7% 22.7% 4.5% 27.3%)

20. I think my vocabulary has improved because the teacher speaks mostly English. (9.1% 31.8% 27.3% 18.2% 13.6%)

21. I think my English accent has improved because I get to practice speaking during English lessons. (18.2% 22.7% 31.8% 22.7% 4.5%)
I think the more English the teacher speaks; the better the students will be in English.  

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 27.3% | 22.7% | 27.3% | 18.2% | 4.5% |

I think I have to speak English during lessons to really learn the language.  

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | 40.9% | 27.3% | 9.1% | 18.2% | 4.5% |

The abbreviations above stand for every answer: strongly disagree (SA), Agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD)

Table 4.2 students expressed in statements number seven, nine, and ten reported that it is essential that the teachers use English during English class, but the students prefer the inclusion of L1. These findings were reported by Hidayati (2012), who conducted a study on the use of First Language (L1) in English class. This research found that the students claimed that their interaction was higher when the first language was used because they felt less lost during course. With a familiar language, they were better able to understand, communicate, and participate during class. Next, in statements number eleven and twelve, the students strongly agree if the teachers use First Language (L1) to discipline them and when the teacher discusses something that is not class-related. Next, statements number thirteenth and fourteen showed that the students agree if the teachers use First Language (L1) when assigning homework and asking students questions, statements number sixteen and seventeen also indicated that it is hard for the students to understand what the teacher is saying when they use English-only. These findings support the previous result of Pablo et al. (2011), who claimed that “There is not a perfectly attainable balance between when and how to use the L1; rather, there is a dynamic decision-making process that occurs within the two groups of participants: the teachers and the students”. These findings show that the students agree if the teachers use L1 when necessary.

Additionally, statements number nineteen, twenty, and twenty-two showed improved English skills when English is the language primarily used during class. The students agree that the more English
the teachers speak, the better the students’ vocabulary and grammar will be. These findings suggest that it is essential to expose English more than First Language (L1). English exposure as the target language is necessary to improve the students’ English skills (Ellis, 2005).

The second category of interviews indicates that students give positive attitudes to the first language usage in the EFL classroom. In line with Pardede’s (2018) finding that the students view Indonesian’s use was helpful in their endeavor to master English vocabulary than grammar. The finding from the interview revealed the reasons. A compliment or feedback expressed in English could be easily understood. If words has complex meanings or grammatical rules are explained in English, misunderstanding is likely to occur.

3. Students’ reasons for supporting or avoiding the first language in EFL classroom

The last category was perceptions of students concerning students’ perception of well-being during English lessons. Six statements related to the students’ perception of well-being during English lessons. The score was applied to describe the students’ perception of well-being during English lessons in the EFL classroom. The following was the percentage of each statement of this category:

Table 4.3. Students’ perception of well-being during English lessons in the EFL Classroom

| No | Well-being during English lessons | SA  | A  | N  | D  | SD |
|----|----------------------------------|-----|----|----|----|----|
| 24 | I most often feel good during lessons. | 31.8% | 36.4% | 18.2% | 13.6% | 0% |
| 25 | Sometimes I feel bad or uncomfortable for having to speak English in front of the whole class. | 27.3% | 22.7% | 40.9% | 4.5% | 4.5% |
| 26 | I am shy to speak English. | 18.2% | 13.6% | 31.8% | 18.2% | 18.2% |
| 27 | I am afraid that other students will make fun of me when I am speaking English. | 22.7% | 22.7% | 27.3% | 9.1% | 18.2% |
| 28 | I often get frustrated because I do not understand | 36.4% | 22.7% | 18.2% | 13.6% | 9.1% |
what the teacher is saying in English.

It is difficult to talk to the teacher and get to know him because I mostly have to speak English with him.

| Total | 27% | 23% | 27% | 14% | 9% |

The abbreviations above stand for every answer: strongly disagree (SA), Agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD)

Table 4.3 these findings are also supported by the previous result of Auerbach (1993), who found in her studies that the use of L1 had a successful effect in lowering the students' anxiety levels and other affective barriers for students. If the students cannot understand what has been mentioned, they will not be comfortable proceeding with a task or retaining it in their minds. The quality of bilingual education provides students with knowledge and literacy in their first language, which indirectly helps them strive for English proficiency (Krashen, 1987). As showed from the description, for the first category, rarely was the option that participants chose the most, and only in statements number two and number four no one students chose the always option. While for the second and the third category, strongly agree was the option that participants chose the most and only there was some statement no one students chose disagree strongly option. The following elaboration will be data discussion that will show the complete discussion and interpretation regarding the result of the questionnaire that has been filled by all participants involved in this study.

The third category of interview reported that the main reason of teacher and students first language use in the EFL classroom is as an alternative language to help them during the lesson. Cole supported this result (1998) stated that, especially with lower-level students who have little or no knowledge of the target language, the use of L1 in reflecting differences between two languages, illustrating basic utterances with L1 could give students a head start.
CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis from the research, it can be seen that teacher often use English and students sometimes even never use English during class. This means that the teachers also include L1 during class in a minimum percentage. While the students still use L1 in a similar percentage with the percentage of English used during class. This frequency of language used refers to the students’ perception on the use of L1 during class. It can be shown that the students’ perception on the use of L1 by the teachers and the students in English classes is positive. They agree that the inclusion of L1 should be permitted with the exposure of English as the target language should be more than the exposure of L1. The use of L1 can make them feel good during class and motivated to learn English. It is hard for the students to understand when the teachers explain using English-only, especially when the teachers explain something difficult like grammar and unfamiliar vocabulary. The use of L1 during English class was helpful in the class only when it was used judiciously with more exposure of English. Several benefits when the class use mostly English are to improve their vocabulary, grammar and English accent.

The research showed the findings that elaborate the perceptions of senior high school students regarding the use of first language (L1) and its reason for supporting or avoiding that earned positive feedback from students. They agreed that first language (L1) is an essential way to help them learning English in the EFL classroom easily. Additionally, the pedagogical implication of this study provides information regarding the use first language (L1) and its reasons from senior high school students’ perception that could aid teachers of English to bestow other language that efficient and practical rather than English-only.

Within this study, the writer could suggest certain points due to the result of this study. First, for those who intend to use first language in the EFL classroom should pay intention to its features, reasons for supporting or avoiding first language, advantages, and disadvantages in
order to get the full potential that would be beneficial for English learning process in the EFL classroom. Second, English teacher should provide guidance in using the first language (L1) in learning activity to omit confuses coming from students. However, teacher is the center of learning and first language (L1) is a device to aid English learning in the EFL classroom. Teachers could monitor the use of other language in the middle of learning.

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