

EXAMINING INDONESIAN EFL TEACHER EDUCATORS' VIEWS ON UTILISING L1 IN L2 CLASSROOMS

Abid*

English Department, Gorontalo State University
Jl. Jend. Sudirman No. 6, Dulalowo Tim, Gorontalo 96128, Indonesia
abid@ung.ac.id

Received: 11th September 2020/**Revised:** 20th October 2020/**Accepted:** 21st October 2020

How to Cite: Abid. (2020). Examining Indonesian EFL teacher educators' views on utilising L1 in L2 classrooms. *Lingua Cultura*, 14(2), 219-224. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v14i2.6703>

ABSTRACT

The research observed the role of the first language (L1) use in the second language (L2) classrooms in various English language teaching (ELT) contexts. Among the many roles that L1 use played in L2 classrooms, which had been recognized, some drawbacks interfered due to unbalanced uses of both L1 and L2. To complement insightful findings presented in the existing literature on this L1 use topic, the research aims to explore L1 uses in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) L2 classrooms in a teacher training program in Indonesia. Applying a qualitative research approach, the research collected data from three English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher educators teaching an English speaking subject in an Indonesian university using a semi-structured interview protocol and a classroom observation fieldnote. Results show that all the participants share the same views on L1 in their L2 classrooms that its use is tolerated and mainly related to cognitive and pedagogical aspects. The research suggests that formal training seeking to arouse awareness on the role that L1 can play in L2 classroom is of necessity in the context of the EFL teacher training program in order to foster learners' optimal L2 output.

Keywords: first language use, second language classroom, EFL teacher educator

INTRODUCTION

Using learners' first language (L1) in the second language (L2) classroom has been an ongoing debate among researchers in L2 teaching. While several researchers acknowledge that the use of L1 within L2 classroom has a limited role on L2 learning progress (Almohaimed & Almurshed, 2018; Ghobadi & Ghasemi, 2015; Çelik & Aydın, 2018), others believe that its uses support learners in making the most of their L2 learning. Debreli (2016), for instance, contends that the use of L1 in L2 classroom helps learners, in particular, to understand better teachers' explanation on specific difficult topics and new lexical items, while Dewi and Setiadi (2018), as well as Tsagari and Giannikas (2018), believe that use it in a principled way help teachers and learners to foster L2 teaching and learning. To complement the existing research on this issue by presenting the views of language teachers in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom setting, the study reported in this research, therefore, seeks to explore teacher educators' (TEs) views on

the use of L1 in their L2 classrooms in the context of teacher training institution in Indonesia.

There has been a shift in how L1 use in L2 classroom is manifested. Research into this area has been extensively done in recent years. For the proponent of maximum L2 use in the L2 classroom, Krashen's (1981) language acquisition theories seem to be the influential concept. Krashen's natural hypothesis, for example, suggests that because people learn another language in the same way as they acquire their first language or mother tongue, they should not be exposed to the dominant use of their L1 for effective L2 results to take place. The input hypothesis, furthermore, states that to learn an L2 thoroughly and optimal use of L2 among teachers and learners should be facilitated (Krashen, 1981), which means that the use of L1 needs to be reduced. Brown (1994) has argued that the target language system is learned through the process of struggling to communicate. It is on this ground that most opinion on limiting the use of L1 in L2 classroom has been based and suggesting that L2 learners should have meaningful exposure to the L2 to obtain the most

benefit (Almohaimed & Almurshed, 2018; Ghobadi & Ghasemi, 2015; Karimian & Mohammadi, 2015).

However, there has been a widely accepted consensus to date, which elucidated the use of L1 in L2 classrooms. On the other hand, it serves as a potential tool that helps increase the chances of success in teaching and learning an L2. In other words, the inclusion of L1 as a working language along with L2 in L2 classrooms can benefit both teachers and learners, provided that it is carefully planned and organized, particularly in the context of EFL. First, Köylü (2018) has examined to what extent EFL lecturers switch to their L1 in their L2 classroom. Data are collected from 155 EFL lecturers who are working in six state universities in Turkey using an online questionnaire. Findings show what caused the participating lecturers to utilize their L1 is the difference in Turkish and English linguistic aspects. The lecturer has reported that they view the use of L1 as useful for providing detailed clarification on a particular target language structure. They also say that referring to L1 is intended to build rapport with their students and cope with their lack of confidence in English proficiency.

Second, Tsagari and Giannikas (2018) have researched the use of L1 and L2 by teachers and advanced learners in the context of EFL situated in the Republic of Cyprus. Informed by a mixed-method approach, this research has revealed a need for a balanced use of L1 and L2. While the teachers view the use of L1 plays an essential role in teaching English, they report that the L1 use symbolizes a pedagogical and linguistic-related flaw. On the other hand, despite feeling linguistically comfortable in an L2 classroom with permission for referring to L1 in particular communication situations, the learners realize that they also need sufficient exposure to English. Given this, the research suggests that the use of L1 should be well-defined and carefully enacted within the L2 classroom in order to facilitate the learners' L2 development.

Third, Turnbull (2018) has investigated the views of a pre-service ESL teacher about using L1 in L2 learning in a New Zealand university. This research uses questionnaires and interviews with 30 participants who are a group of native and non-native speakers of English. The results show that the participating teachers have mixed opinions on the topic being investigated. While some have negative views of L1 use in L2 classrooms, others show a positive attitude towards its uses. However, the findings also reveal a gap in the teachers' knowledge about how to deal with L1 as a potential learning tool for their ESL students. Thus, the research has suggested ESL teacher education program needs to accommodate the use of L1 in its curriculum with a specific focus on the indirect, underlying beneficial, and facilitating roles of the L1 for both the teacher and students in the classroom (Turnbull, 2018). This will ensure that the teacher candidates will be aware of the need to incorporate L1 use in L2 classroom and how this should be enacted for effective L2 teaching.

All these studies suggest that there are some good

reasons for using L1 in L2 classrooms across English language teaching contexts, such as promoting good rapport between teachers and students and facilitating a better understanding of particular target language aspects. In fact, as there has been an increasing number in EFL classrooms across the world, it is reasonable to re-examine the traditional view of limiting the use of L1 in L2 classrooms as this is no longer relevant to the dynamic of today's EFL teaching praxis. Saruwatashi (2020) has argued that it can be very challenging to promote, actualize, and maintain constant use of the TL (Target Language) by both teachers and learners in an EFL classroom with the same L1. This is particularly the case with low proficient learners who are often challenged to use classroom L2 interaction as useful and meaningful input to learn and who find limited opportunity to expose themselves to L2 interaction beyond the classroom (MacPherson, 2019; Saruwatashi, 2020). That is why, within such an EFL situation, L2 may not always serve as the predominant language of instruction (Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017; Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2020; Tian & Hennebray, 2016), as misunderstanding can interfere because of difficulties in understanding L2 expressions among teachers and learners.

To what extent this dynamic view on L1 use within L2 classrooms presents within the context of EFL teacher training program in Indonesia, the research asks a key research question; what are teacher educators' views on the use of L1 in their English-speaking classes? By asking such question, the research aims to inform the current EFL teacher training program about how the role of L1 within L2 classroom has been taken into account and put into practice, which is essential in examining the efficacy of L2 proficiency improvement plans stipulated in the curriculum of the teacher training program.

METHODS

A qualitative research approach is applied as a framework for conducting the research. Three teacher educators (TEs) working in an English teacher training program of an Indonesian university agree to participate voluntarily. This program is the institution that has a mandate from the Indonesian government to educate candidates for English language teachers at the school level. The duration for completing the course is within four years, along with a compulsory undergraduate thesis writing requirement. In this program, the English majors (EMs) learn a range of language knowledge, such as linguistics, research, and English for your learners; language skills, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing for academic purposes; as well as teaching practices and community service program.

All the participating TEs in the present research hold a postgraduate degree in English education, graduating from Indonesia and overseas universities, and reported to be advanced English language users.

They are speakers of bahasa Indonesia as their first language, which is also shared by all their EMs. These TEs are teaching the speaking class, which suits the research objective. A semi-structured interview method is employed to collect data from these TEs, with each interview session lasting between 30-45 minutes. All participants are asked several prompted questions during the interviews: (1) What language do you use the most in your speaking class? (2) Why do you use particular language during a particular session of your class? (3) How do you see the use of languages other than English in your class? (4) To what extent do you encourage the use of English in your class?

In addition to the interviews, classroom observations on the TEs classes are also done to crosscheck the TEs responses found in the interview transcripts. Therefore, a reflective observation field-note is developed to capture certain events during the participants' classes that are relevant to the research question of the research and the participants' interview responses.

Upon completing data collection, interview transcripts are returned to all participants for a member checking purpose for establishing the research's trustworthiness. Following this step, it is translating the data into English, which is done individually to remain closer to the data being analyzed. For the analysis, a thematic analysis method is used. This is begun by initially reading through the transcripts several times to be familiar with data before starting coding. Then, all coded data are analyzed and grouped in order to generate themes that addressed the research question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results show one major theme which addressed the research question. It is tolerating the use of L1 in L2 classroom, with three identified sub-themes: L1 use helps in understanding concepts or instructions, L1 use helps in coping with particular L2 linguistic breakdowns, and L1 use helps in creating an enjoyable and stimulating L2 classroom. These are further explained in the following section, which begins with presenting data from the interviews, followed by the classroom observation field-notes. Afterward, the discussion session follows. Table 1 summarises the sub-themes identified and their sources.

Table 1 Sub-Themes and Data Sources

Data source	Sub-themes
TE1	L1 use helps in understanding concepts or instructions
TE2	L1 use helps in coping with particular L2 linguistic breakdowns
TE3	L1 use helps in creating an enjoyable and stimulating L2 classroom

All the TEs' interview excerpts are presented in the following section. There are a number of underlined phrases or sentences. These are the evidence used in classifying codes and generating the main theme. First, it shows data generated from the interviews about sub-theme 1: L1 use helps in understanding concepts or instructions. TE1 has suggested that because the majority of EMs have grown up speaking bahasa Indonesia as their everyday language of communication, the use of this language in English classrooms shall be tolerated. This does not mean that L1 use would outweigh the use of English as the primary language of instruction in the English classroom. However, it functions as a complementary language to English for specific reasons, such as to accommodate a mixed proficiency level of EMs to understand task instructions or explanations of a concept by the TEs.

“Well, to me, it is okay if they mix it with Bahasa Indonesia because they are not born with English. They are here to learn English, right? If you force them to speak English all the time, they won't speak because may be they are afraid. So the first thing that you have to do is just let them speak.” (TE1: 56)

For TE1, teacher educators shall always bear in mind that one of their responsibility is to ensure that they could facilitate EMs to learn English. EMs shall be guided to find ways to learn the language and to make progress in this language learning. As TE1 implied, learning English can also be carried out by using L1, for example, when EMs try to ask for clarification while listening to TEs' talk. If L2 class means prohibiting the use of L1, this TE perceives that it might be hard for EMs to make progress in L2 learning. EMs would probably feel reluctant to continue speaking English at times of linguistic communication breakdown as they know about the rule of L1 use in the L2 classroom. For low proficient EMs, this means experiencing anxiety. The worst-case resulting from this is that EMs would become demotivated to showcase their ability to speak English as a learning path to polishing their L2 speaking skills. Therefore, TE1 has suggested what TEs could do to anticipate this proficiency issue or acceptability of L1 use in L2 classes to foster L2 learners learning progress is to 'let them speak'. This means allowing the use of L1 to help EMs stay involved in L2 interaction at times of linguistic-related communication breakdowns, where they can find ways to continue expressing themselves in English while monitoring the progress of their English proficiency level.

In sub-theme 2, L1 use helps in coping with particular L2 linguistic breakdowns. TE2 has a slightly different view on the use of L1 in the L2 classroom. For this TE, what matters the most is how classes the use of L1 shall be tolerated. This TE perceives that if it is a speaking class, all EMs should be encouraged to speak English as much as they can, which may mean

limiting the opportunity to refer to Bahasa Indonesia.

“I think, it depends on the class. If it is speaking class, I will encourage them to speak English as much as they can. If it is writing or reading, I think they can also use Bahasa Indonesia, if they get stuck, you know. But, the most important thing for me is they feel dare to communicate in English.” (TE2: 25)

However, TE2 maintains that if it is a class other than speaking, such as writing or reading, EMs may speak in bahasa Indonesia to cope with particular linguistic breakdowns. This TE implies that TEs need to consider the main purpose of a class again in order to make the right decision as to taking bahasa Indonesia as part of the classroom working language along with English. Despite this, TE2 perceives that it remains useful for the EMs' English proficiency level improvement if all TEs encourage them to use English as much as they could when in the classroom. As TE2 puts it:

“We need to encourage them to use English orally as well, for their improvement, because they will teach English in the future. So, when my students asked, “what language to use, ma'am? English or Indonesian?” I said, “try to use English”, even though many of them still feel difficult to speak the language, to express themselves. But, that's okay.” (TE2: 14)

In sub-theme 3, L1 use helps in creating an enjoyable and stimulating L2 classroom. TE3 has also supported the use of L1 in the English classroom. Nevertheless, this TE suggests that, to some extent, she would only allow those low proficient EMs to refer to using bahasa Indonesia to stay involved when communicating in English orally. In other words, for more proficient EMs, the use of bahasa Indonesia shall be kept at the lowest level.

“For me, it depends on their ability. Not all of them can speak the language fluently. When they have to speak English, I don't want them to feel stressed, to do all given speaking tasks. So, I approach them persuasively. I give them an opportunity to speak English. But I have to make sure that they won't feel much pressure if they have to speak English.” (TE3: 5)

TE3 implies that the main reason for tolerating the use of L1 is to create an enjoyable yet stimulating atmosphere for English use to be initiated and where all EMs could participate. A key aspect to be taken into account for this TE when teaching English speaking skills is to help EMs feel comfortable exploring and accomplishing every given classroom task that demands them to speak in English. The pressure often arises from fear of being judged due to English low proficiency level or a lack of confidence in using the

language for oral communication. For TE3, it needs to be carefully addressed within the classroom. It is important for all TEs to think about finding the most appropriate way to encourage all EMs to use English for communication purposes in the classroom.

Data generated from the classroom observation field-notes, using bahasa Indonesia during a particular situation in the classroom between TEs-EMs and EMs-EMs is noticeable. It is predominantly heard as the TEs (e.g., TE2 & TE3), for instance, attempt to re-explain a particular concept/definition and to re-emphasize specific instruction for EMs to engage in task-based classroom activities. As a result, the dialog in English, despite being marked by language combination (bahasa Indonesia and English language) at some points, occurs.

“The lecturer started the class by doing an ice breaker. She then introduced the topic for today's lecture. In a few minutes later, the lecturer checked the student's answers on a given exercise in the previous meeting. Following this, she asked the students to share any challenges they faced while working on the exercise. The lecturer used both English and Bahasa Indonesia while speaking at this stage. This led to dialogs with the students with some of them ending up responding in Bahasa Indonesia.” (TE2's class, 1st year EMs)

“The TE opened the class by asking if the students had done their homework. Apparently, as the students reported, many of them had not done it yet because they did not get the worksheet for some reason. The lecturer continued to ask the students to listen to a short talk recording and to work on some exercises. After that, she checked the students' answers by engaging them in conversation. Later on, as the lecturer also switched to ask questions in Bahasa Indonesia, some students responded in that language as well when they had difficulties to continue speaking in English.” (TE3's class, 1st year EMs)

All these interview responses, along with the observation field notes, show several reasons for using L1 in the participating TEs L2 classes, in this case, speaking subject classes. First, the TEs use L1 and allow EMs to speak in the language as well in order to accelerate in EMs L2 learning and to yield positive results. Such acceleration is also highlighted in Sali's (2014) research. This research examines one EFL Turkish classroom and reveals that the use of L1, particularly by the teachers, helps the students cope with their anxiety during learning English and to continuously engage in the classroom communicative activities, such as rehearsing dialogs and answering teacher's questions. For less proficient English learners, teachers' use of L1, a shared language in the classroom, may help the learners gain emotional

support and motivation, which further strengthens the classroom rapport and trust (Köylü, 2018). Given this, classroom dynamic L2 oral interaction involving teachers and learners can be facilitated as long as there are clear guidelines on how this L1 shall be used by teachers and learners during L2 classes to accommodate L2 output (Turnbull, 2018).

However, it also makes sense to say that using L1 in L2 classes is not well defined and accommodating L2 output. It may hamper L2 learners' progress in comprehending L2 outputs. This disadvantage stems from the fact that the learners may not feel challenged to understand the English utterances they hear when communicating orally in English because they can simply find all the utterances' translations. As Köylü (2018) has reported in his research, some of his participating EFL teachers also believe that the use of L1 might hinder Turkish English learners from gauging useful input, which helps them produce meaningful L2 output. Therefore, for L1 use to take place effectively in L2 classrooms, language teachers may need to attend training courses that help them decide on when and how L1 shall be used within the classrooms (Abid, 2020; Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2020; Tian & Hennebry, 2016; Turnbull, 2018). Subsequently, learners may benefit from their teachers' pedagogical training on using L1 to compensate for their lack of L2 linguistic competency when interacting orally in an L2 (Saruwatashi, 2020; Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2020; Tian & Hennebry, 2016). For instance, they would become aware of the L1 role in the L2 classroom and balance their uses to facilitate maximum output in L2 during various forms of collaborative engagement (Abid, 2020; Zulfikar, 2018).

Furthermore, when it is done properly, using L1 in L2 classes could also help language learners find ways to improve their oral proficiency level. When teachers use L1 to facilitate L2 output, learners may become aware of what target language structures they need to memorize and apply to support them when interacting using the target language (Du, 2016; Saruwatashi, 2020). As such, according to Zulfikar (2018), a language teacher should make a well-grounded decision as to when and why it (L1) can be used in L2 classrooms. They need to be fully aware that the use of L1 in their L2 classroom shall be only used to assist in building L2 knowledge, fostering personal interaction among teachers and learners, as well as improving teaching efficacy (Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2020; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2018). According to Dewi and Setiadi (2018), this will help learners make the right decision as to when to refer back to their L1 at times of L2 linguistic difficult situation in an L2 classroom. These researchers have reported that their participating English majors claim to refer back to the Indonesian language in an English classroom situation where their lecturers decided on using the language because it is much simpler than in English to make a particular complex explanation understandable.

CONCLUSIONS

The research has shown that the three participating TEs share the same views on the use of L1 in their L2 classroom. The TEs have reported that the reasons why L1 use shall be tolerated in their L2 classrooms are related to cognitive and pedagogical aspects. As with the first aspect, the use of L1 helps EMs understand concepts or task instructions, which can be more demanding when done in the target language. As TEs' L2 classrooms involve EMs with a mixed L2 proficiency level, it makes sense that drawing on maximum use of L2 when in the classroom is challenging. On the other hand, the latter aspect assists TEs in coping with L2 linguistic breakdowns and creating an enjoyable and stimulating L2 classroom, where less proficient EMs feel secured and less anxious compared to L2 classrooms where there is a total abandonment of L1 uses. However, little can be elicited from the TEs about whether or not L1 use has been addressed in their teaching syllabus or their teacher training program's curriculum.

The research suggests that there should be a balanced use between L1 and L2 in L2 classrooms for an optimal L2 output to occur. Given this, it is relevant for the teacher training program to take into account L1 use in L2 teaching so that not only an awareness of the L1 role that increases but also the ability to implement L1 uses in L2 classrooms that improve. Future research that specifically examines this topic from the perspective of EMs or in-service English school teachers may aid insightful knowledge to current literature on an L1 role in L2 classrooms situated in the EFL context.

REFERENCES

- Abid. (2020). Promoting English speaking skills: Lessons learnt from the EFL classrooms context. *European Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 4(4), 183-192. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.371052>.
- Almohaimeed, M. S., & Almurshed, H. M. (2018). Foreign language learners' attitudes and perceptions of L1 use in L2 classroom. *Arab World English Journal*, 9(4), 433-446. <http://doi: 10.24093/awej/vol9no4.32>.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Çelik, Ş. S., & Aydın, S. (2018). A review of research on the use of native language in EFL classes. *The Literacy Trek*, 4(2), 1-14.
- Debreli, E. (2016). Perceptions of non-native EFL teachers' on L1 use in L2 classrooms: Implications for language program development. *English Language Teaching*, 9(3), 24-32. <http://doi: 10.5539/elt.v9n3p24>.
- Dewi, U. P., & Setiadi, C. J. (2018). Language attitude and language choice in bilingual academic learning environment. *Lingua Cultura*, 12(4), 369-373. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v12i4.4288>.
- Du, Y. (2016). *The use of first and second language in*

Chinese university EFL classrooms. Singapore: Springer.

- Ghobadi, M., & Ghasemi, H. (2015). Promises and obstacles of L1 use in language classrooms: A state-of-the-art review. *English Language Teaching*, 8(11), 245-254. <http://doi:10.5539/elt.v8n11p245>.
- Karimian, Z., & Mohammadi, S. (2015). Teacher's use of first language in EFL classrooms. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 2(3), 61-71.
- Köylü, Z. (2018). The use of L1 in the tertiary L2 classroom: Code-switching factor, functions, and attitude in Turkey. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 15(2), 271-289.
- Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- MacPherson, J. (2019). Assessing learner needs for general English course design. *Junshin Journal of Studies in Humanities*, 25, 141-155.
- Mayo, M. P. G., & Hidalgo, M. A. (2017). L1 use among EFL mainstream and CLIL learners in task-supported interaction. *System*, 67, 132-145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.05.004>.
- Sali, P. (2014). An analysis of the teachers' use of L1 in Turkish EFL classrooms. *System*, 42, 308-318. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2013.12.021>.
- Saruwatashi, S. L. (2020). Principal reasons for using L1 in the L2 classroom. *Junshin Journal of Studies in Humanities*, 26, 77-87.
- Shin, J. Y., Dixon, L. Q., & Choi, Y. (2020). An updated review on use of L1 in foreign language classrooms. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(5), 406-419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1684928>.
- Tian, L., & Hennebry, M. (2016). Chinese learners' perceptions towards teachers' language use in lexical explanations: A comparison between Chinese-only and English-only instructions. *System*, 63, 77-88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.08.005>.
- Tsagari, D., & Giannikas, C. N. (2018). Re-evaluating the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom: Students vs. teachers. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 11(1), 151-181. <https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0104>.
- Turnbull, B. (2018). Examining pre-service ESL teacher beliefs: Perspectives on first language use in the second language classroom. *Journal of Second Language Teaching & Research*, 6(1), 50-76.
- Zulfikar, Z. (2018). Rethinking the use of L1 in L2 classroom. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 6(1), 42-51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.22373/ej.v6i1.2514>.