An investigation into teacher’s L1 and L2 use in Indonesian EFL classroom

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Abstract
Teacher’s L1/L2 use in Indonesian EFL classroom has been the object of debate among practitioners of a second language and foreign language teaching. Despite the considerable amount of the research that has been conducted on the phenomenon, the focus has often been the advantages and disadvantages. This study reports on a study that investigated subject teacher’s language use on Indonesian EFL classroom. It reports research conducted in a private secondary school in Makassar. An Ethnography research has been employed to collect data on how the teacher perceives the L1/L2 use and the extent to which the approaches they adopt impact on students’ achievement. The research result demonstrates that the more active the teacher in promoting L2 learning, the more he is aware of the teaching practices used in the classroom. Also, the research result also reveals that the more he improves the quality of his teaching approach, the better language learning his students acquire.

Keywords:
L1/L2 interaction; teacher’s language; EFL Classroom

1 INTRODUCTION
The issue of employing the first language in second language classroom had been receiving considerable research attention from many practitioners and second language researcher. Both proponents and the opposites of L1 use in the L2 classroom have no absolute statements to ban one of these two opposite views. This ongoing desire impelled the researchers and the teachers to find out some helpful methods and techniques to improve L2 learning and teaching processes. Some theories were supportive, and the other was contrastive regarding the use of L1 in the L2 classroom.

One of the advocate of L1 use in foreign language teaching, Cook (2016) believed that L1 use was a facilitating tool in L2 teaching and learning. It was supported by Miles (2004) who said that L1 did not hinder the learning process in the classroom. Aligned with this aspect, Macaro (2001) maintained that teachers decided the L1 use for learning process improvement. However, it is required to understand that there was always a limitation for L1 inclusion in L2 classroom syllabi. Also, it must not be overly used since it debilitated learning the process and made the students lazy. These particular conditions seemed to yell positive impact of L1 use in the L2 classroom.
Even though there were some studies which avoided the use of L1 in L2 classroom, there were no principal reasons to avoid the use of L1 other than allowing students to hear as much L2 as possible. The result of Carson and Kashihara (2012) in their study directly suggested that L1 use should be used since it helped students to learn L2. The consideration of L1 use in ESL classroom also had been proven by Hung (2012) who found that the use of mother tongue should not be viewed as having drawbacks. It could be used as teaching strategies to explain meaning effectively and efficiently.

This was commonly based on the reality of EFL students and context which underlying the teachers used L1 in teaching English. De la Campa and Nassaji (2009) reported those teacher’s reasons to use L1 in classrooms were affected by foreign language context, students’ proficiency level, set up, of course, students’ objective of learning L2, the acoustic layout of the classroom, and speed of discourse. This reasons impelled that EFL classroom was not the real context of L2 social culture, so teacher preferred using L1 in order to make students engage in and make sense in the L2 learning process.

On the other side, the proponents of L2 use argued that L2 use results lead to enhancement of oral interaction. It provided a TL-rich environment to the learners where learning opportunities were maximized via increased interactions between teacher-students and student-student (Jacobs & Kimura, 2013; Tang, 2002). It was similar with Littlewood and Yu (2011) who said that the main reason for advocating the maximal use of L2 was that for most L2 learners classroom was the only opportunity they enjoyed for being exposed to L2. These two reasons consistently emphasized the significance of providing L2 learners with an L2-rich learning environment.

The school in which this study took place was a private school had demonstrated a firm commitment for giving an opportunity for students to learn and acquire English as well as L1 use. Both teachers and students have Indonesian as their language background. Most of the students learned English since they were in first grade in elementary. Different phenomenon immerged in seventh-grade students where the students were heterogeneous who had a different level of knowledge in using English, moreover, some of them had no experiences in the L2 environment. Interestingly, the subject teacher had a strong commitment to using maximal L2 in language teaching. Therefore, it became an interesting phenomenon to be studied and compared with the previous studies which were expected to have a contribution in the field of second language research.

2 Literaturereview

2.1 L1 and L2 Interaction

Mostly, a person acquired the language in his/her early childhood because their family used that language and it was used in the region where he/she lived in. It was known as a mother tongue or first language. Bloomfield (1933) defined the first language a human being learns to speak is his native language. Some early studies mentioned that mostly, children had been exposed to more than one language in their early childhood, meant that they might have more than
one native language. In term of language teaching, L1 and L2 referred to the language preference that the teacher used in different parts of classroom interaction. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2013) defined L2 as a language that the students being learnt during the lessons and the teacher also used it during language teaching.

Singleton et al. (2013) proposed several functions on the use of L1 in L2 teaching, for example, to convey and check the meaning of the words, explain the grammar, organize the class and tasks, maintain classroom discipline, contact with individual students, and for testing. Some issues immerged regarding new ideas and theories about the use of L1. Other theories were supportive while the other one was contrastive regarding the use of L1 in the L2 classroom. As described by Ellis (2005) that the students learned faster when they received and being exposed to the more L2 environments.

2.2 Teacher’s Language Attitudes towards Using L1/L2

Some studies related to teachers and learners’ L1 use in L2 classroom had been carried out in order to investigate their attitude towards the use of L1 in the language classroom. Kelly and Bruen (2015), for example, it was found that the subject teacher had positive attitudes regarding the use of translation and the use of L1 in language classrooms. There was a similarity between their findings and what had been found in Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008) study. The findings showed that both learners and teachers were already had positive belief related to monolingual languages classroom, even though in reality, their actions would be based on their attitudes toward L1 use in L2 classrooms. It showed that there was a contradiction between what the teacher and the learners’ belief and their attitude toward the use of L1 in the L2 classroom.

Crawford (2004) surveyed the language teacher’s attitude toward L1 use in Australia. The result revealed that the teacher’s beliefs regarding the purpose of the program might be a key factor in their attitude toward L1-L2 choice. The majority of the respondents believed that their L2 use maximizes learners’ experience of L2, the use of L2 reflect teacher’s confidence in learner’s ability to learn, and L2 was more effective for teaching grammar. She argued that the level of L1/L2 use had been affected by the teacher’s proficiency. However, the improvement of teachers’ proficiency did not give guarantee due to the change of teachers’ language classroom, in fact, the teacher resorted to L1 use at all most levels of course.

2.3 Students’ Achievement on the Use of L1/L2 in EFL Classroom

Several studies had also been conducted to investigate how much L1/L2 use had impacted in EFL classroom. As shown in Levine (2003), he found that the students who experienced more of the target language in class seemed like had less anxiety to use the target language. They got benefit in the way they got easier to speak in their L2 use as more they practiced devotedly. It supported Turnbull, Cormier, and Bourque (2011) who said that allowing teacher’s L1 use in EFL classroom might lead to an unmitigated use of L1 which could be detrimental to learners’ L2 acquisition. Therefore, there should be a judicious decision toward the use of L1 and L2 in the language classroom in order to reach learning’s goals that the teacher had been set before.
Also, as shown in Keomany (2006) study that the students in the first academic year in National University of Laos showed no progress. He said that the use of teacher’s L2 in language learning had affected such a low achievement to the students. The teachers believed that the students should be taught in English to have them get more language exposure toward L2 use. Therefore, all explanations which had been given in language teaching were provided in English.

3 Method

The data in this study was designed in the form of ethnography research; it was drawn from a set of in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The subject teacher was a secondary teacher in Metro School, one of a private school in Makassar. The students whom he has been taught were graded seventh, and it was the most homogenous class in term of their background knowledge of L2 use. Four of them were new students in the first semester who have a difference in their school environment. The subject teacher had Indonesian as his L1 but had been decided to use English as his primary language in his language teaching.

The study took several techniques in collecting the data; those were classroom observations, field notes, interview, video recording, audio recording, document, and reflective journal. The data had been analyzed through an interactive model which was proposed by Huberman, Miles, and Saldana (2013). It consists of four stages, namely (1) data collection, (2) data display, (3) data condensation, (4) conclusion; drawing/verifying.

4 Findings and Discussion

This study was aimed to gain teacher’s perceptions of the use of L1/L2. Psychologically, human perceive something by using their thought, mental set, and perceptual experiences. By using these three ways, the result revealed that the teacher was highly advocating teacher (HAT) who advocated exclusive use of L2 and endeavor to find alternative ways to avoid using L1 during teaching. He showed a positive attitude in applying L2 use in classroom interaction. As he had confirmed in an interview session that he preferred to use English only in the classroom, it was similar to Ellis and Ellis (1994) who confirmed that one similarity between L1 and the L2 learner is that they cannot acquire TL unless they receive input; they need to be exposed to the TL extensively.

Regarding the teacher’s mental set, he was categorized as a highly expecting teacher (HET) who put high expectation on his students without decreasing the amount use of his L2 use in classroom interaction. He assumed that it would not hinder teacher-students and student-student communication, but supported them to the real-life environment. As insisted by Rosa and Leow (2004) that if the teacher abandons the use of TL in the classroom, learners will not be convinced that the foreign language they are learning could be an effective means of communication.

Another perception that the teacher confirmed in interview session indicated that he was a highly monitoring teacher (HMT). By using his perceptual experiences, he monitored his teaching materials based on students’
condition during language learning, whether it was suitable to students’ need, students’ interest or not. As suggested by Horwitz (1988), listening too closely to our students, identifying mismatches in belief, and by clearly explaining why we do what we do in the classroom, it may be possible to significantly allay students’ frustration. Through perceptual experiences, the teacher gave strong motivation to the students in learning and had provided many sources in maintaining his students with rich TL environment.

Regarding teacher’s teaching practices, practices of HAT teaching in EFL classroom were delivered in maximum L2 use. Not only the teacher’s explanation but also all materials were designed and printed in English. It can be seen through group work activities where they worked together in small cooperative teams to complete the task. As claimed by Ellis (2003) that tasks play important roles in language teaching, which focuses on developing learners’ ability to use the language in real communication. Through these activities, the students were engaged to build their confidence in using English in classroom interaction.

Similarly, practices of HAT teaching in EFL classroom, practices of HET teaching also provided rich TL environment. The activities were done by choosing the students randomly in a group and kept maintaining a high standard on students’ ability. Another activity which has been applied was pair works activities. The teacher believed that through their different level of knowledge, the students could have many opportunities to complete the task given. By randomly choosing the students into pair works activities, they could be challenged in exploring their previous knowledge in identifying the topic given. On the other hand, they also could have the opportunity to share their opinion with their pair and tried to find out a brief conclusion related to the task given. The result showed that the students could find enough opportunities to express themselves in TL.

Practices of HMT teaching in EFL classroom were held through innovative approaches and activities where the students were engaged in blended learning. For example, Edmodo networking activities where the students and the teacher interacted through online learning and they were engaged through outside classroom activities. Some additional assignments and tasks were provided through this activities, and it had been fulfilled with more relax and less threatening environment learning for the students. As stated by Henderson (2001) that this type of learning has advantages, one of them is that the information is easy to be updated and learning is possible 24 x 7 hours per week.

Based on the classroom observation, the students demonstrated their learning achievement through writing and speaking skill. As shown in students’ writing example, the students showed impressive progress in the way they produced the words in writing a short story. Even though they still struggled in the grammatical problem, teacher’s feedback had become a reliable resource in improving their writing competence (Patak & Hamimah, 2012; Patak, Naim, Said, & Asik, 2013). Meanwhile, in speaking skill, the students showed a better result in the way they moved from short responses to longer responses.
All data extract indicated that the implementation of teacher’s L2 use effectively encouraged students to practice more L2 in classroom interaction. As had been said by Paul and Chan (2010) that if this had not been realized, the students might have found it difficult to connect with their teacher and might not have felt comfortable or inspired to experiment with L2 use. Similarly, Harmer (2015) stated that the students used language according to their purposes and it is necessary to be there as a listener and a speaker for effective communication.

Another students’ achievement also had been shown by the way they actively participated in classroom activities. Moved from being quite passive in response teacher’s questions to actively interact in classroom activities. Brown (2014) claimed that the advantage of talking to another individual who shares the same daily experiences which you have and sees is that you can take so much background knowledge for granted.

Another interesting part of students’ achievement was shown by one of the new students in grade seventh. She was identified as a passive student in the classroom interaction since she entered the first semester. Surprisingly, by the time, she showed better progress in the way her anxiety about joining an English camp in Bangkok with other students from different countries. It showed that teacher’s high expectation of the students’ ability in learning English had led his students to participate in a learning community that supports students learning. It was suitable with Timperley and Phillips (2003) who reported that teacher’s expectation for students achievement become their goals for the students and shape their daily classroom decision and action. By having specific learning goals, it helped the students to become intrinsically motivated and engaged in their learning.

5 CONCLUSION

The English teacher in this study was categorized into highly advocating teacher (HAT), highly expecting teacher (HET) and highly monitoring teacher (HMT) based on the way he perceives the use of L1 and L2 in EFL classroom. Dealing with his perception of the use of L1/L2 in classroom interaction, it was found that it was in alignment with his language practices in the classroom. Teacher’s perceptions not only have influenced his language use in classroom interaction but also, in turn, it had affected language teaching practices. The students demonstrated their learning achievement through written examples and other products. They continuously progressed even though they kept struggle in grammatical structure.

This study was expected to give valuable implication for EFL teachers. They are expected to raise their awareness regarding the use of available languages in the classroom in order to match classroom language use to the pedagogical goals they have set. For the students, this study was a note that L2 use in language teaching could become better equipment due to the lack of their language skills to enhance their motivation to use English. While the finding of this study has valuable input in the field of bilingual education research, the scope of such study for the future research needs to be expanded to another school across the country.

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