

Evaluating Translanguaging Practices in Bilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

The debate over whether English language classrooms should include or exclude students' native language has been controversial issue for a long time (Brown, 2000). In order to overcome this situation, several studies have been conducted to find out the students' perception toward the monolingual or bilingual approach in their classroom. It was started in the 1990s where mother tongue was attached in the language classroom. Auerbach (1993) stated that "Starting with the first language (L1) provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. Auerbach further reports that the use of L1 shows positive results among researchers and learners, Furthermore, the use of L1 in the classroom apparently help students to understand several tasks such as "language analysis, presenting grammar rules, discussing cross-cultural issues, giving instructions, explaining errors and checking comprehension". Translanguaging in this case offers a better solution for learners who are still hesitating whenever they want to communicate in English. García (2009) explains the term as "the act" used by bilinguals in order to communicate ideas effectively by autonomously selecting their own words and language expressions. The following research would like to conduct further observation into more specific topic under translanguaging. The main focus is to analyze how lecturers deliberately send their knowledge by translanguaging. The grammar class itself would be selected for observing the following phenomena since there are some rules and forms of English structure needs to be explain in details. The process of translanguaging in this case will probably provide a way for the lecturer and students to build a bilingual environment in order to understand the message clearer. The observers will record the strategies applied by the lecturer whenever he switches the language from English to Bahasa Indonesia purposely.

Keywords: *translanguaging, bilingual approach*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Bilingual education in Indonesia comes to its popularity in the early 2000, and nearly a decade later Sekolah Bertaraf Internasional (SBI) has started to promote the use of mixed English-Indonesian in their subject lessons (Astika, 2013; Harbord, 1992). It noted that the instructions should be given in English to maximize the students' exposure to the target language. Moreover it is also

assumed that the more students are exposed to English, the more quickly they learn; as they hear and use English, they will internalize it to begin think in English and the only way they will learn it is if they forced to use it. Regarding to this belief many English language teachers attempted to have either a monolingual or bilingual interactions in the classroom. Unfortunately the situation make students who have lesser language ability would be passive learners, unconfident and tend to rely on their language teacher. Harbord (1992) added that it has failed to get the meaning across, leading to student incomprehension and resentment. The debate over whether English language classrooms should include or exclude students' native language has been controversial issue for a long time (Brown, 2000). In order to overcome this situation, several studies have been conducted to find out the students' perception toward the monolingual or bilingual approach in their classroom. It was started in the 1990s where mother tongue was attached in the language classroom. Auerbach (1993) stated that "Starting with the first language (L1) provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English". At first teachers still believe that dominant use of L2 should be promoted in the classroom and avoiding to the L1, some have even excluded the L1 with the belief that the natural process of mother tongue can be applied in L2 as well. In addition the immersion between L1 to L2 should be kept separated without any translation needed (Cummins, 2005). Many English language teachers have tried to create English-only classrooms, but have found that they have failed to get the meaning across, leading to student incomprehension and resentment (Harbord, 1992). However, there is little research that can contribute positive result regarding to this belief.

Auerbach further reports that the use of L1 shows positive results among researchers and learners, Furthermore, the use of L1 in the classroom apparently help students to understand several tasks such as "language analysis, presenting grammar rules, discussing cross-cultural issues, giving instructions, explaining errors and checking comprehension".

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explains the term as “the act” used by bilinguals in order to communicate ideas effectively by autonomously selecting their own words and language expressions. Different than the term “code-switching” where it used either “intrasententially” or “intersententially”, here translanguaging was firstly used as a pedagogical practice. Translanguaging was firstly applied in Welsh bilingual classroom in order to gain deeper understanding and knowledge, shaping experience, sharing different language use according to the content being taught (William, 2002, as cited in Mi Sun, 2012). Therefore translanguaging goes beyond what has been termed code-switching, although it includes it.

Based on my previous research that discussed about how importance the Bahasa Indonesia used in the classroom, there are 44 students from 80 students believe that they prefer to use Bahasa Indonesia during their English learning in the classroom. Furthermore there are many situations preferable such as in the translation class, whenever they want to talk about things unrelated the English topic, talking about culture, and in grammar classes. It can be concluded that students would like to understand the lessons deeper but sometimes the language that they learn creates gap between their understanding and the knowledge delivered. With a proper strategy, the lecturers in this case can manage how they can switch the languages in the classroom such as when they have to use Bahasa Indonesia or English; do they need to translate English into Bahasa Indonesia all the time or they have to select in specific part of the lesson.

As the continuation of my previous research, therefore the following research would like to conduct further observation into more specific topic under translanguaging. The main focus is to analyze how lecturers deliberately send their knowledge by translanguaging. The grammar class itself would be selected for observing the following phenomena since there are some rules and forms of English structure needs to be explain in details. The process of translanguaging in this case will probably provide a way for the lecturer and students to build a bilingual environment in order to understand the message clearer. The observers will record the strategies applied by the lecturer whenever he switches the language from English to Bahasa Indonesia purposely.

Furthermore, the following study attempts to find out how translanguaging reflected in the classroom related to the students performance and achievement/ academic outcomes e.g. tests, assessments and examinations. In line with the research background previously, the following research has several objectives, those are:

- to find out how the process of translanguaging is used pedagogically in the classroom.
- to investigate and describe the students' language practices, their translanguaging practices with the lecture or among themselves.

According to Baker (as cited in Colin, Jones, & Lewis, 2012), there are four potential educational advantages to translanguaging. Those are:

- It may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter
- It may help the development of the weaker language
- It may facilitate home-school links and co-operation
- It may help the integration of fluent speakers with low level learners.

In line with the advantages above, the following study aims to introduce translanguaging strategies for those who never think about the possible to learn and adjust language easier. It also hopefully can narrow down the gap between their first languages with English. Further result may give some consideration to apply the L1 approach in the classrooms which have English grammar as the main subject.

2. Literature review

2.1. Monolingualism and Bilingualism

Several reasons that underline monolingual research in class is that the more L2 is being exposed in class, the faster the students learn (Ellis, 2008). However this condition should be related with the students' language environment. In EFL setting, mostly L2 are being used only when students engaged with the subjects like in English classes. There are many cases teachers like to underestimate students who use L1 in their classroom, some teachers without hesitate give consequences to those students who dominantly speak L1. Cook (2001) argued that teachers tend to try their best separating L1 from L2 in their teaching by using various numbers of techniques such as ask their learners to

imitate how the teachers construct the target language. Furthermore he has identified three fundamental principles of the monolingual approach (though he is not a supporter of the approach). The following are the principles:

- a) The learning of L2 should model the learning of L1 (through maximum exposure to the L2).
- b) Successful learning involves the separation and distinction between L1 and L2.
- c) Learners should be shown the importance of L2 through its continual use.

Besides the principles, some monolingualists believe that native speakers are the ideal teachers whereas the term 'native' itself is debatable since there are many English varieties spreading throughout the world (Phillipson, 1992, as cited in Mirza, et al., 2012).

Besides, as bilingual teachers are proficient in two languages, they have a higher level of metalinguistic proficiency and awareness that enable them to teach better (Mora, 2009, as cited in Mirza, et al., 2012).

On the contrary bilingual approaches are used in the classroom in order to help students understand the material from the point of view of languages that they have understood earlier, especially with the language they have been grown up with.

According to Lam (2001, p. 93, as cited in Molina et al., 2005), bilingualism "refers to the phenomenon of competence and communication in two languages". There are many types of bilinguals. Those are:

- *Equilibrated bilinguals* who have both equal competence in languages
- *Dominant bilinguals* are those whose languages are more skillful than the other one.
- *Coordinated bilinguals* are people who can use the two languages in the same situations.
- *Compound bilinguals* are those who can relate and use each language into different contexts.

Furthermore, *early* and *late* bilinguals are determined *when* they learn each language also whether they learn the languages simultaneously or consecutively. In the process of becoming a bilingual, the individual may develop negative attitudes towards his/her mother tongue, and become a *subtractive bilingual*. If those attitudes are positive, then he/she is considered an *additive bilingual*.

2.2. Translanguaging

Several terms that describe *translanguaging* (Park, 2012) have been emerged in recent past such as *flexible bilingualism* (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), *polylingualism* (Jørgensen, 2010), *metrolingualism* (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), and *code meshing* (Michael-Luna & Canagarajah, 2007; Canagarajah, 2011). Finally it comes to *translanguaging* which was first mentioned by the Welsh educator, Colin Williams (1996) and developed by García (2009) and many others (García & Velasco, 2014). García (2009) expanding the term into processes where students incorporate the language practices of school of their own linguistic repertoire freely and flexibly. For example students may use their first language either in productive or receptive use and giving them liberty in exposing their knowledge. She regards it as a strategy that bilinguals use to make meaning, shape their experiences, gain understanding and knowledge, and make sense of their bilingual worlds through the everyday use of two languages: “translanguaging is indeed a powerful mechanism to construct understandings, to include others, and to mediate understandings across language groups (García, 2009).

Translanguaging is seen as a tool in a pedagogical approach to negotiate meaning in classroom settings, particularly multilingual ones. The process mostly occurred in learners’ productive and receptive language skills (García, 2014). *Productive* and *receptive* language skills are both used to gain information and communicating. This is where languages are working together to form the knowledge. *Receptive skills* such as listening and reading whereas *Productive skills* such as speaking and writing. Learners have the options to use their first language (L1) in order to gain the knowledge and expose their second or foreign language (L2) to perform their ideas. The preferences would be depend on the learners’ language ability.

2.3. CLT and ESA

English subjects have been implemented in the classroom variously, from *grammar-translation* up to *task-based learning*. One of the most successful approaches which have been applied by many English teachers is *communicative language teaching* (CLT) method where this method requires not only language

grammar is important but also the usage as a means of communication. CLT involves *language functions* by using the *language exponents* (Harmer, 2007, p. 50). CLT asks teachers to involve their students in a form of discussions by using real messages and not focusing only in grammatically controlled language.

Since the CLT method that provides opportunity for the students to speak out their mind, therefore it is suggested that the sequence of lessons also should be staged. One lesson stages is proposed by Jeremy Harmer (2007) that includes three elements those are *Engage*, *Study*, and *Activate*. Furthermore, *Engage* describes the situations where the teacher uses some activities such as games, music, discussions, etc that will bring the students to the topic related. Here students will be asked to make predictions about what are they going to study. *Study* on the other hand, learning the concepts and theories such as forms and usage and *Activate* is about putting theories into practice by doing some experiments or real-life situations. The sequence can be illustrated as follows:

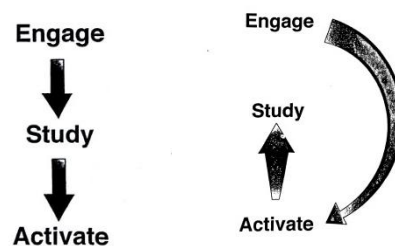


Figure 1. ESA

Furthermore, the application of ESA in the classroom can be categorized into several steps which commonly used by some teachers. The following is the steps that I adopted from my classroom and then classified them into ESA categories.

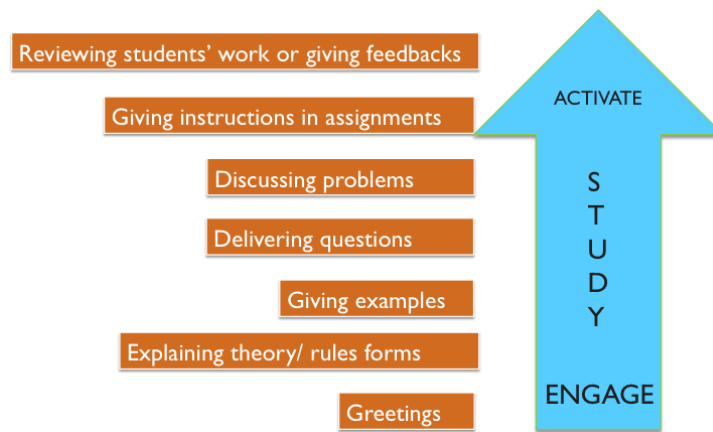


Figure 2. ESA in the classroom

Started from greeting, usually teachers introduce the material in the beginning of the lesson, the forms of *engaging* can be in the form questions in order to brainstorm the students knowledge about what are they about to learn in the lesson. Next, the teacher usually starts to explain the theory/rules/ forms and give examples, here the step *study* is used. Other than explaining, delivering questions also can be used in this step especially when the purpose is to monitor the students' understanding. Questions can be delivered also in the form of discussions. The last step is *engaging* where teachers give some evaluations regarding to the lessons they have learnt previously followed with giving feedbacks once the students do their lesson practice.

2.4. Previous Studies

Research in translanguaging was once conducted in order to find out its development in the academic writing bilinguals. It reviews the emerging literature on learning and teaching theories of translanguaging and presents theoretical understandings of biliteracy development and specifically on the teaching of writing bilingual learners. Based on the five written text produced by young bilingual writers, the translanguaging is used in the planning, drafting, and production stages. Translanguaging in writing is here proposed more as a self-regulating mechanism in which bilingual students can engage, rather than pedagogy to be used in the teaching of writing itself. The article shows a clearer result where translanguaging approach has the most potential in constructing

academic language compared to monolingual and bilingual ones. (García & Velasco, 2014)

Another study on translanguaging was conducted by Adamson & Fujimoto-Adamson (2012) which investigated language advising in a self-access center (SAC) in a Japanese university. The aim is to encourage *translanguaging* into ‘English-only’ language policy. Based on the interviews and questionnaires, students showed positive result toward the translanguaging and give them a self-access knowledge.

3. Research Methodology

The study used an open-ended questionnaire to investigate the learners’ language background. Interviewed with the teachers and students’ questionnaires that reveal how translanguaging occurs in practice and how it helps to create a learning space and help them to gain deeper understanding and knowledge specifically in the grammar class. The data-set is comprised of field notes taken from the two observed classes, audio recordings of those classes, an interview with the lecturer, and documents of students’ quizzes and exams. All the data gathered from observation journals, interviews, and audio recordings will be analyzed and presented in details as in qualitative method. Some elaborations will explained about the finding of the translanguaging practices in the classroom. The journal will be taken for a month and continued with the interviews with the selected participant. The participants are 80 English students of Language and Culture Major from 3rd, 5th, ad 7th semester and 14 English lecturers of Universitas Bunda Mulia.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Views on L1 Approach in the Classroom

Based on the questionnaires delivered previously, the following table shows how L1 have been adopting in class, even though it has not been designed as part of the lesson or in other words the use of L1 was applied spontaneously. Therefore before the action research was conducted, the researcher pose the first

question in order to seek out how do students and teachers view the use of L1 in the classroom, the following is the result:

- *Do you think that Bahasa Indonesia should be used in your class?*

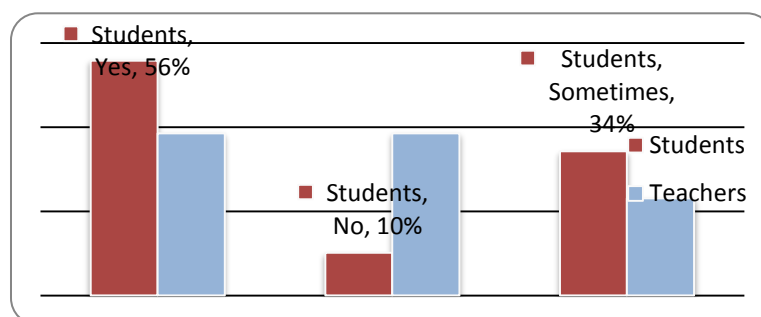


Figure 4. Teachers and Students view on the use of L1

The result shows that more than half students agree with the statements, which mean that they probably will have liberty in expressing their ideas, moreover in getting the information clearer, especially when they are dealing with subjects that require deeper understanding. On the contrary, teachers are more like to disagree with the statements, however some of them also agree to use the language in the classroom meanwhile for the rest respondents will occasionally allow their students to use Bahasa Indonesia in the classroom.

In response to this question, the following item was asking about *when do they feel to use Bahasa Indonesia in the classroom*. Regarding the productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) skills, the needs in using Bahasa Indonesia occurred in both ways.

In productive skills, students responded that they would need to use L1 especially whenever they want to explain new ideas or concepts also when they have new vocabularies. In other words they would like to deepen the meaning by discussing it further in L1. Also when they face complicated theories and would like to make it clearer by discussing it with their friends.

In receptive skills, the students will choose to use L1 specifically in grammar class such as in giving instructions and functions. The needs to listen and read in L1 also occurred whenever they want to understand some complicated theories such as in cultures, linguistics, and translation. There are some students

who feel exhausted on reading lots of English books, which have complicated sentences.

On the other hand, teachers listed more reasons whenever they use Bahasa Indonesia in the classroom. They tend to use the language mostly in giving explanations whenever they see their students got confused with the lessons delivered, specifically, when they come to some terminologies explanation and keywords. Bahasa Indonesia also used in thesis discussion and when the material is considered very difficult. Teachers are also more tolerable when they see their classroom show very weak language skills. Here, they hope that they can motivate the students by speaking in L1 and minimizing the gap among them.

Furthermore, in informal situations teachers use L1 more often, such as in texting, talking casual topics, during the break, and having small chats outside the classroom. Here teachers do not focus too much on their students' language skills. However, there are conditions they mix the languages. The following are the overall responses made by teachers and students.

- *When do you feel the lecturer needs to use Indonesian in class?*

TEACHERS	STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in translation class • when they don't understand • explaining terminologies • teaching non basic skills • during the break • finding the meaning • new concepts • to motivate students speaking English • students can learn English faster • when they can't continue in English when giving opinions • when they are very weak (language skills) • when the material is to difficult • talking unrelated things • emphasizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explaining new words • explaining functions • when the instructor hard to explain • when the lesson is hard to explain • in grammar class and translation class • in theory class • talking theory • to make it clearer • complicated theories • Indonesian is our culture, why not? • during the material introduction • explaining some important points

Figure 5. The needs of using L1 in the classroom

The similarities perception between teachers and students can be seen that, firstly both of them agree that is Bahasa Indonesia would be best used whenever they are discussing new concepts. Here teachers may do bilingual approach by translating the theories into L1, and on the other hand students also may ask questions in L1

in order to gain more understanding. Secondly, teachers and students also agree to use L1 when they are talking subjects other than English, such as in casual conversation. Another similar opinion also reflected in explaining difficult points, here the students even specified more like in grammar classes where they are challenged to understand some complicated formulation.

4.2. Translanguaging in the Classroom Practices

The following are results on how teachers use L1 in a designed ESA that mentioned earlier. For the subjects that have been taught which was Grammar 1, it is clear that the lecturer preferred to use L1 most in giving examples and also in discussing problems. As in Grammar class, examples help students to understand deeper in using some of the forms. However in explaining theory the lecturer mostly used English, maybe because some instructions in the book are basically explained in English. Other than giving examples, discussing problems also becoming the lecturer preferences in using the L1. Overall we could see here, that the translanguaging begins when two areas in ESA are applied those are in giving examples and discussing problems whereas other areas that seems to difficult to understand the lecturer used L2 most.

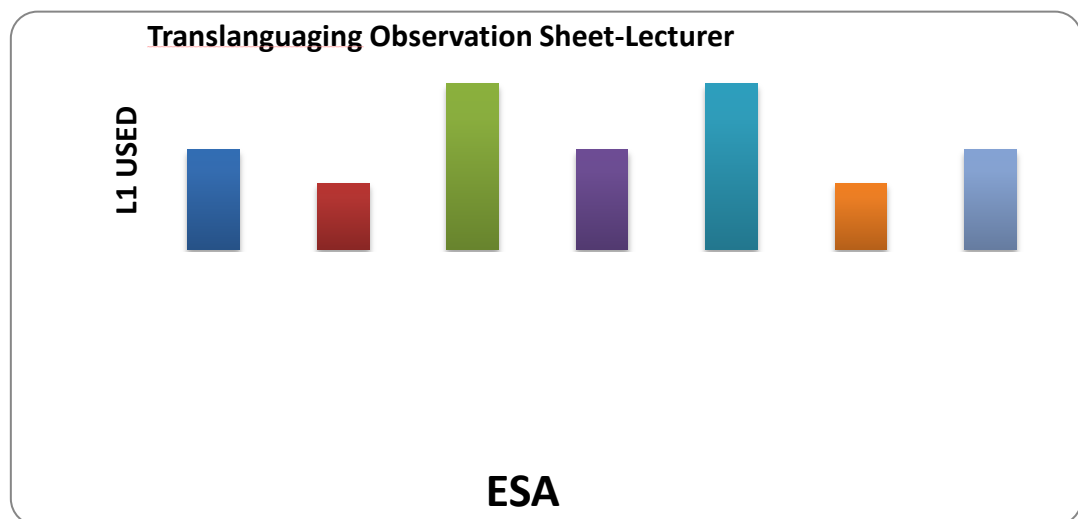


Figure 6. Result on translanguaging used by the lecturer

For the students result, similarly with their lecturer that they see L1 used most in discussing problems, on the other hand the different is that they see their lecturer used most in explaining the theories rather than in delivering questions. The reasons were probably because the lecturer tend to mix the theory explanation together with the examples where he used more in L1. Other areas also showed the just like the lecturer has, furthermore the following is the overall result on students' views on translinguaging in the classroom.

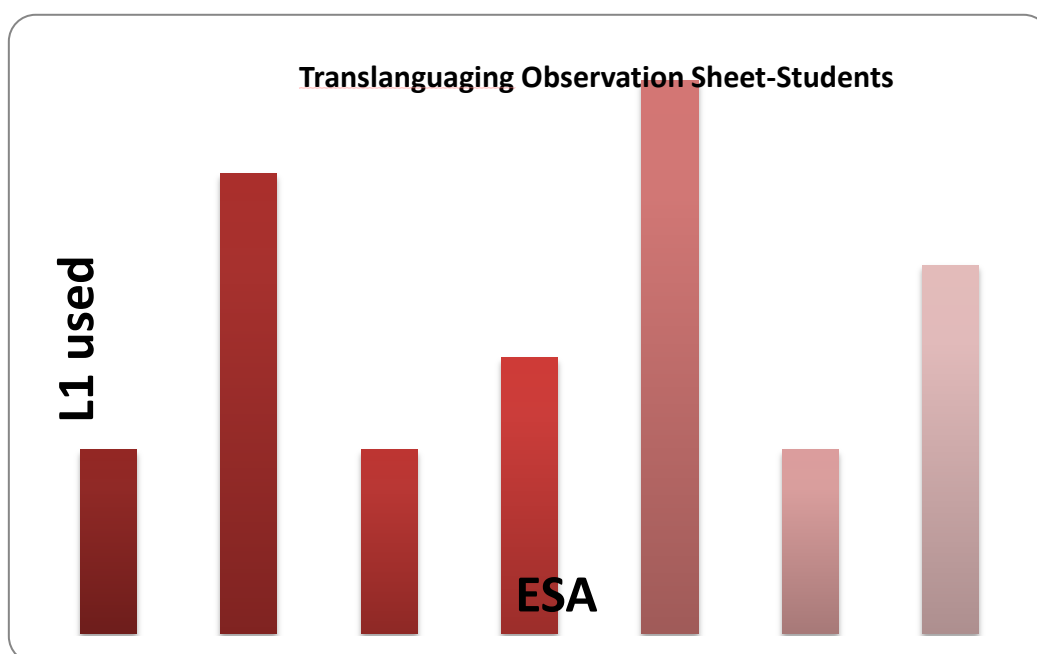


Figure 6. Result on translinguaging used by the students

Based on both results we can see here that the process of translinguaging looking at from both sides (the lecturer and students) have the same views where giving examples and discussing problems have the same needs in applying translinguaging.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

This research is intended to show how do teachers sometimes putting too much pressure on the students by keeping the classroom only allowed English and sometimes isolating Bahasa Indonesia even though it will contribute students' deeper understanding. On the contrary, the questionnaire results revealed that most students did not feel the strong need to use English most of the time. In the

receptive language skills, students prefer to use Bahasa Indonesia for deeper discussion especially when it talks about instructions and complicated theories. In productive language skills, students are expected to speak and write in English thus students with weaker skill are still considered to be able to use English only in expressing their ideas. Teachers, on the other hand even though they are being reluctant in using Bahasa Indonesia in their classrooms seemed quite tolerable and try to make the students more comfortable in using English whenever they want to. They understand that isolating Bahasa Indonesia will only demotivate students in exploring more English.

There were some limitations to the study; Students' comments towards the English only interactions only come from their self-awareness on their language productions due to the English only interactions with the teacher. There is no clear evidence that the students have become more proficient in English.

It suggested that when teachers use L1 in English classroom for language learning purposes like conveying word and sentence meaning which are closely linked in the mind; explaining grammar. Using L1 also can be used whenever the teacher organizes the class to do some tasks; maintaining discipline, and getting contact for individual feedback. Atkinson (1987) and Auerbach (1993) summarize how teachers can apply L1 into the following;

- Providing instructions; concepts; grammar; explaining concepts.
- Classroom management duties which do not exist in L2 in order to have time efficiency.
- Humanistic approach, in order they have ideas deal with culture and habits.
- A learner-preferred strategy.

Based on the results, undoubtedly the role of L1 in the classroom management, instructing language learning skills and performing all types of activities and language assessment of students should be repeatedly emphasized. As teachers, we should finally free ourselves of the old misconceptions on using English exclusively in the classroom and shift our views to involving L1 in our teaching practices which can hopefully assist the process of the foreign language learning. It is better to have the students more proficient in their English language rather than deficient native speakers.

Translanguaging, on the other hand offers a better solution in applying the L1 in the classroom, the purpose here is to minimizing the language gap for the students, especially who are in the first year of their academic education. The designed translanguaging also can provide a more comfortable environment for the students and eventually increasing their motivation learning English.

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