Using L1 in the teaching of English as a foreign language

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ABSTRACT The recent discussion of the use of L1 in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has now focused on how to use the L1 effectively. Most researchers and advocates agree that L1 use is inevitable because it is a natural part of language teaching activities. Although many have suggested that language educators should be able to use L1 in the classroom wisely and judiciously, not many researchers have done investigated the ideal way to use L1. Employing a qualitative approach, this research focuses on investigating the factors encouraging three English lecturers to use L1 during their teaching activities in an Indonesian university. A semi-structured interview was employed to collect the data and, then, the data was analyzed using the narrative analysis approach. The findings reveal that the three English lecturers use L1 in their teaching activities in the classroom depending on some basic factors. The factors encompass the students' mood, English proficiency level of the students, level of subject difficulty, students' motivation, and classroom atmosphere. The result of the study challenges the advocates who support the use of full English instruction in the classroom activity to reconsider their theory. It is suggested that a future study should be conducted in the same field by involving a bigger number of participants from different universities and employing more than one data collection method. In addition, a future investigation about the effect of L1 use on the students' achievement is also worth conducting.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although L1 use in L2 classrooms is still a controversial issue (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009), most literature has now focused on discussing how to use the learners' L1 effectively in the language classroom rather than whether to use it or not (Yavuz, 2012; Moore, 2013; Lee & Macaro, 2013). On the other hand, there has been massive criticism regarding the monolingual instruction that has been applied by many English educators as a way to provide incomprehensible input to the learners (Carson & Kashihara, 2012). In addition, the tendency of many English educators to avoid L1 use is merely based on their belief without scientific evidence (Zacharias, 2004).

The use of L1 in the classroom should be considered as one type of teaching aid like diagrams, pictures, demonstrations, real objects, etc (Alshammari, 2011). It is because the use of L1 in the language classroom is unavoidable irrespective of the teachers' and the learners' backgrounds (Mart, 2013). Therefore, it is highly suggested that English teachers or lecturers should show the balance and wisdom to use L1 in the classroom.

For most English educators, there is still a big confusion of what should be done to be wise and judicious in using L1 in the language classroom (Littlewoodk & Yu, 2011).

The context of this research is a private university in Indonesia in which English is one of its departments. This investigation is set out to uncover the reasons for three English lecturers in using L1 at an Indonesian university during their teaching activities. Two research questions have been made to ease the research process:

1. When do the English lecturers decide to use L1 in the classroom activities?
2. How do the English lecturers use L1in the classroom activities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Factors of L1 Use in Language Teaching

The occurrence of L1 use during classroom interaction, generally at the high school level, has been found to be somewhat low. Some studies have proofed this low level of use (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Moore, 2013; Leemin , 2011; McMillan & Rivers, 2013). Among the existing knowledge, a finding provided by Moore (2013) and Afzal (2013) can be considered more prominent compared with the other literature.

A research on the learners' perspective at one of the Japanese universities involved the students of English as a foreign language (Moore, 2013). This study reveals that the use of L1 was, on average, around 28% of the classroom interaction. Another study shows that L1 use in the language classroom is even less than 10% (Afzal , 2013).

After conducting the investigation on the learners' view, the low frequency of L1 use was reported during the

classroom activities (Tamimi Sa'd & Zohre, 2015). Another research discovered 15.41% of L1 words were done by the students in completing the classroom tasks (Azkarai & del Pilar, 2015). A study reveals that only 16% of the total interaction in the class used L1 (Storch & Aldosari, 2010). Hence, in regards to the average percentage of applying L1 during classroom interaction, most of the researchers have found that L1 use is generally low.

There are some factors determining the level of L1 use in classroom interaction. The most eminent factor is the function of L1 in teaching activities. The utilization of L1 in language classroom interaction offers three benefits (Sali, 2014). First of all, L1 use contains the academic function that refers to how a teacher communicates the contents of the lesson to the learners. Secondly, L1 use brings managerial function to the classroom. This function refers to the management of lessons and students' attitudes. Lastly, L1 use has a social/cultural function that refers to the way the teacher shows sympathy to the learners. This function is mainly intended to construct a closer relationship with the learners. A similar finding proposed that L1 use functioned to show phatics as well as a basic means to explain vocabulary and grammatical rules (Azkarai & del Pilar, 2015).

Another research has also reported two other major functions [12]. Firstly, L1 can be an effective means to help the learners manage the task in the class. Its function is even more apparent when the students are confronted with new and difficult tasks. Secondly, L1 was found to be effective when the learners have to choose the appropriate vocabulary to facilitate L2 learning. Therefore, language has a strategic position as a cognitive and psychological tool to mediate social interaction and mental activity. The above findings reflected that the learners' L1 cannot be separated from the language teaching process [17]. So, the occurrence of L1 use is a natural process in the language teaching process and, therefore, the English educators may not deny it.

Another prominent factor is the goal of the lesson and the teaching task. The most common consideration of the language teachers in applying L1 in the class is the goal of the course and the nature of the task (Manara, 2007). If the lesson is emphasized more on the content understanding, L1 use is more likely to occur to make the input more comprehensible. Similarly, in order to achieve the goal of the task, L1 is highly recommended to use because it can ease the process of completion. The frequency of using L1 during classroom activities is dependent on the basic goal of the teaching (Yavuz, 2012). L1 rarely appears in classroom interaction if the teaching objective is to improve the learners' communicative skills. Meanwhile, if the teacher more emphasizes the linguistic understanding of the learners, L1 use is frequently taking place.

The last factor worth mentioning is the learners' proficiency level. It is noted that the English level of the learners was one of the factors determining the level of using L1 during the classroom activities (McMillan & Rivers, 2013; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). L1 use should be applied for the language learners at the beginning level (Manara, 2007). In contrast, university students get more advantages from the L1 teaching method compared to the L2 only method (Lee & Macaro, 2013).

2.2 The Benefits of L1 Use in ELT

The phenomenon of using L1 during classroom interaction has also attracted researchers to investigate its advantages (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Yavuz, 2012; Alshammari, 2011; Leemin , 2011; Afzal , 2013; Schweers, 2009). The essential advantage of L1 use is the increasing level of the learners' motivation (Yavuz, 2012). Language educators can use L1 to deal with less motivated learners. A study shows that foreign language learners can be much easier to understand any difficult expressions in the target language when allowed the use of L1 in the classroom (Schweers, 2009; Yi-chun & Yi-ching, 2010). This finding is also clearly linked with the suggestion that the natural tendency of language learners to use their L1 during classroom instruction should be considered as a part of communicative tasks (**?**).

L1 use is also found to be beneficial in terms of cross-cultural understanding. L1 use could lead to a better understanding of the culture embedded in the target language (Schweers, 2009). As a result, they will show more respect and appreciation to the culture and customs of other people. Finally, learners can be more aware that their own language and the foreign language can co-exist and not threaten each other (Alshammari, 2011).

The noticeable increase of the learners' language skills is also another advantage of L1 use during classroom instruction. A research involving 100 students and 10 teachers revealed the use of L1 as an effective means to improve the learners' skills in the target language (Afzal , 2013). When L1 use is embedded into a communicative task, the learners' skill improvement can be maximized (Leemin , 2011). Using L1 in classroom instruction is useful to improve the learners' understanding of the foreign language and create a more convenient learning circumstance (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). The utilization of L1 on the students' writing skillsreveals that some aspects of the learners' written expressions such as organization/unity, cohesion/coherence, structure, and mechanism with significant improvement (Ahmadian et al., 2016).

One of the most prominent benefits of L1 use is its socio-cognitive rule (Anton & Dicamilla, 1999; Gierlinger, 2015; Storch & Aldosari, 2010). The use of L1 can psychologically establish more collaborative talk during classroom interaction (Anton & Dicamilla, 1999). More specifically, it is mentioned that the use of L1 functions to effectively establish intersubjectivity, scaffolding, and convenient private speech in the classroom. Therefore, the slow process of understanding the lesson due to limited skills of the target language can be prevented by applying L1 in the teaching process (Yi-chun & Yi-ching, 2010).

Upon the completion of investigating the amount and purpose of using L1 by teachers and students, the obvious merit of L1 is an effective means to clarify the meaning, set up classroom arrangement, manage a convenient atmosphere, prevent the learner's anxiety feeling, break a certain amount of communication barrier, and establish the cooperation to reach the common lesson aim (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015).

3. METHOD

This study applied a qualitative approach. The qualitative study refers to one of the major types of research strategy that uses wording style to present data and analysis (Bryman, 2016). Words or text, in this regard, can refer to the

interview transcript, field notes, or images (Schutt, 2011). The qualitative approach was chosen in this research because it is interesting to apply since it offers various points to view the phenomena being examined (Stake, 2010).

3.1 Design

A semi-structured interview was applied as the primary method of generating data. A semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which the interviewer sets up the guide but the participants are still given big freedom to tell what they are thinking (Scott & Usher, 2011).

Several types of questions include introductory, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, and interpreting questions (Kvale, 1996). Different types of questions in each stage of the interview are basically divided into three types; initial open-ended questions, intermediate questions, and final questions (Charmaz, 2002), which are adopted in this research.

At the initial open-ended questions, the English lecturers were asked about their teaching background. The next questions relate to the condition of the recent English class they teach including the lecturers' and the learners' L1. This question was intended to create a smooth flow to the next question level, intermediate questions. In the intermediate questions, the interview activity was designed to uncover the phenomena regarding L1 use during classroom activities. This phase can be called the core interview session since it deeply digs the answers to the research questions. The last phase is the final questions where the interviewer reconfirmed and clarified the participants' answers in the intermediate questions.

The entire interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. The next action to do is coding the data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995)[32] with the aim to address the following concerns: what the data represent, what the data is about, and what research question the data tries to answer.

3.2 Participants

The participants were selected based on some criteria. First of all, they had to be non-native English lecturers. Secondly, the lecturers should have been teaching English for at least two semesters in the appointed university. Thirdly, the participants were willing to be interviewed. Three English lecturers were selected and presented here with their initials: IJ, SR, and IF.

4. RESULT & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The findings are presented sequentially from IJ (participant 1), SR (participant 2), and IF (participant 3).

4.1.1 IJ (participant 1)

The learners' mood and readiness are the main reasons IJ uses L1 in his teaching activity. Although his main target is to expose the students to the target language as much as possible, he fully realizes that forcing them too much might otherwise result in a negative impact. Despite his preparation for English-only instruction, he always checks the class atmosphere. The English class he teaches mostly begins with full English and, sometimes, after some minutes he notices the sign of boredom or tiredness. Hence, when the situation is tiring, everyone is tired, so using Indonesian is a way of relaxing."

IJ applies L1 also to clarify the explanation of the material concept at hand as well as to provide a linguistic comparison between the learners' L1 and the target language. IJ asserts "my intention is not only to teach them English but also to strengthen their Indonesian". Meanwhile, the purpose of providing a comparison between the learners' L1 and the target language is also to teach the students of cultural understanding between those two languages.

Since IJ teaches students with different English levels, he uses L1 to facilitate the involvement of the lower-level proficiency students. He claims "we want to include them in our class, makes them happy whatever the problems or difficulties in their English language learning, we can share through Indonesian. So, they belong to our group while we maintain their motivation."

When asking whether or not the use of L1 should be included as a part of the teaching strategy, IJ expresses his support. He asserts that "we must not underestimate the function of the first language." The advantage of L1 is claimed more essential as the learners come from the same language background. He asserts "as they are homogenous with Indonesian mastery, it is unavoidable for the students and also for the lecturers like myself to use Indonesian in particular time or situation and for any strategies." Therefore, he confirms that "acknowledging L1 as a teaching strategy is natural, normal and should be part of the policy."

4.1.2 SR (participant 2)

SR states confidently that the use of L1 during classroom activities is necessary. She proposes some basic reasons. Firstly, SR affirms "it has the function to explain the certain concept that may not exist in our language". Due to her different cultural background, she has experienced such situations on some occasions. She gives the example when the teaching topic is about the airplane. SR openly confesses that it is difficult to explain some parts of the plane since some particular terms do not exist in the learners' L1. Therefore, she emphasizes "the function of L1 is to explain or give an extended explanation about a certain concept."

Next, her reason for using L1 is to provide a clearer elaboration of English grammatical rules. Similar to IJ, SR acknowledges that grammatical rule is also difficult subject to explain. One prominent positive impact of the L1 use is that the learners can compare the structure of the target language with their L1. She claims that being able to compare, to some extent, may accelerate the learners' comprehension of the structure of the target language.

Thirdly, in the situation when the learners experience an issue with their motivation to study, encouraging them in their L1 is more heart-touching and effective. She confirms "to give them motivation sometimes I use it." In addition, in her opinion, it is generally known that many students do not really like to learn English because of the difficulties they experience. L1 use, to some extent, can break a certain amount of such difficulties. The fourth reason is to get closer to her students. As what she conveys to the learners is clear and understandable, L1 functions "to reduce the distance between them." She affirms that the closeness may bring the feeling of security to the learners during the learning process in the classroom. As a result, L1 use can function to gain maximum attention from the stu-

dents. She exclaims "they fully pay attention to me because they feel secure in my class." When learning English as a foreign language, the students still feel reluctant to practice and talk in the target language because of their worriedness to make mistakes. Most of the time, they choose to keep silent because they are shy to speak. Hence, SR claims that the use of L1 may overcome this issue.

4.1.3 IF (Participant 3)

IF considers incorporating L1 as a language of instruction in the classroom activities when the students are confronted with the problem. He refers the problem to any difficulties or hardships experienced by the learners that may be including their trouble in practicing the communication or in completing the task. The condition can be worse when the learners cannot propose feedbacks to teachers regarding the materials at hand. He states "sometimes the students can not give feedback to the teachers because their feedbacks cannot be understood if their proficiency is not fulfilled."

IF also argues that he decides to choose L1 use as part of the teaching strategy because he confidently believes that it is more convincing for the students compared to the other strategies. Some other strategies such as "gestures, mimes, and body language" may occasionally be used but not the first choice. L1 use is seen to be the best option over all of them. He states "because I think it very easy for them to use the L1 instead of the other strategies."

Regarding the ideal language of instruction in the EFL classroom, IF convincingly asserts that the class should be run in the target language (English). In his case, he openly claims that he cannot deny the reality that it is almost impossible to force the EFL learners to involve in the English-only use in the classroom activities. In his university context where the students are mostly from remote areas around the region, he as the lecturer needs to work extra hard to help them. He says "we can tolerate with their ability or their proficiency."

The use of L1 is also one of the best solutions when teaching difficult subjects. IF is responsible for teaching some difficult subjects such as semantics, phonetics, and pragmatics. He explains "if we force them to speak English more than eighty percent they cannot understand what the teacher means, and I believe that they are not going to be able to do the task."

4.2 Discussion

This study shows that IJ has used L1 in the EFL classroom when the students seem to be in bad mood. As a lecturer, who has very long teaching experience, IJ is aware that the mood and the comfort of the learners is one of the decisive factors in the success of language learning. L1 can be an effective weapon to establish a comfortable learning atmospher, as a result from the learners' quicker comprehension of the material at hand (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009).

When the teacher allows the use of L1 in a language classroom, the students have a more collaborative conversation in the class. When the collaboration among the students runs more intensely, it is more likely to be the factor promoting a more convenient learning atmosphere (Storch & Aldosari, 2010; Anton & Dicamilla, 1999; Gierlinger, 2015).

In this research, it is shown that IJ also makes use of the learners' L1 to prevent any potential drawbacks that may hinder the success of the learning process. One of the biggest challenges faced by foreign language learners, moreover those as beginners and at pre-intermediate level, is the slow process of understanding the material. While it may be true that using L1 is not beneficial to the learners' communicative skills, it can be the solution when the learners confront some degree of confusion to comprehend the materials.

All three lecturers confirm that they benefit from L1 use to explain and teach the subjects that they consider difficult. IJ and SR sometimes apply the students' L1 when elaborating the grammar (Azkarai & del Pilar, 2015; Sali, 2014), while IF makes use of L1 to teach phonetics, semantics, and pragmatics. Generally, the subjects seem to be difficult when the lecturers emphasize more on content mastery. The difficulty may go to both sides, the lecturer and the students if the class is set out to be in full English. On the side of the lecturers, they have to struggle harder to select more simple words and sentences understandable to the students. On the other hand, students also need extra effort to understand their lecturers' explanations. In such a case, it seems that the lecturers do not have the better option except to use L1 in the class interaction. The finding above confirmed that the goal of the teaching activities is the main factor of how to use the L1 in class (Anton & Dicamilla, 1999).

Another important finding from this study is the use of L1 may promote the students' understanding of their own L1. IJ focused not only on the target language mastery but also on strengthening the mastery of the learners' first language. In regards to this matter, comparing the learners' L1 with the target language can lead the learners to be more aware and appreciative of their own language identity [15]. Normally, when learners have good skills in their first language, they can learn the target language more easily.

On some occasions, IJ also uses that opportunity to promote the cultural comparison embedded in both English and the student's first language. Language and culture are inseparable and, therefore, teaching language also means introducing the culture of its users. In addition, since learners can show growing confidence towards their own culture, they realize that both cultures can co-exist and their existence does not threaten each other (Alshammari, 2011).

It is shown that all lecturers in this study state that they use L1 in their teaching activities mostly for those whose English ability is still low. It is generally known that the lower the English ability the learners have, the slower their understanding process will be. The basic reason for employing L1 in the classroom is the level of English ability of the students (McMillan & Rivers, 2013; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003).

The above finding also justifies the evidence proposed by Lee & Macaro (2013) claiming that the university students, as well as the young learners, will gain more advantages from mixed language instruction rather than English-only instruction. Although their study does not clearly mention which level of target language proficiency, it can be confidently assumed that it is for the lower English proficiency students.

This study has also discovered that L1 use provides a positive effect on the students' motivation. The existing literature has shown the same evidence (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Yavuz, 2012). The reason for the close connection between L1 use and the students' motivation seems to lie in

the students' emotional factors. For the language learners, it is more likely that the best way to motivate them is not by using the target language but using their L1 irrespective of their proficiency level in the target language.

The next essential phenomenon found in this research is that SR has benefited from the L1 use to get closer with her students. Naturally, people will easily get closer with others when they communicate using the language they are most familiar with. On the contrary, the learners usually are not able to feel the sense of emotional expressions in the target language such as the sense of humor, sense of sadness, and sense of joking (Storch & Aldosari, 2010).

This study is also in line with much previous research regarding the percentage of using L1 in the classroom. As a matter of fact, IF has allowed the use of L1 about 20% in his teaching activities that has been discovered by some previous studies (De la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Moore, 2013; Leemin , 2011; Afzal , 2013; McMillan & Rivers, 2013; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). This phenomenon shows that English teachers generally try their best to involve and expose their students to the target language atmosphere. While it is true that exposure to the target language is one of the best ways to familiarize the students with the language, it is also important to bear in mind that full target language exposure without the explanation using the learners' L1 may result in some degree of confusion.

This research has also found that L1 use can function as a means of relaxing when the classroom atmosphere seems to be boring and tiring. IJ acknowledges "when the situation is tiring, everyone is tired, so using Indonesian is a way of relaxing." As for the students, anxiety comes when they experience uncertainty in the class. In language class, this occurs when the learners are not sure of what the instruction is about due to their limited understanding of the target language expressions.

The common problem faced by the English learners especially those who are still at the beginning level is the shyness and reluctance to speak in the class. Allowing the use of L1 in this period may gradually reduce their reluctance till they reach to the level where they have gained their confidence. Using their own mother tongue may break a certain amount of communication barrier with their lecturer (Azkarai & del Pilar, 2015).

SR has used L1 in the classroom to get the students' attention. When the class seems to be uncontrollable, the lecturers should use authoritative expressions to give warnings to the class. If the warning is given in the target language, the students will more likely ignore and show disobedience. On the contrary, when the warning is stated in their first language, the learners will more likely show obedience and more serious attention.

Quite similarly, IF has also gained the advantage of L1 use to get feedback from the students regarding any problem they encounter in their study. In some cases, when the learners are required to involve in full target language interaction in the class, they will likely have difficulty proposing the feedback. Feedback, in this case, may refer to direct feedback using verbal language. This type of feedback is no less important because it can be a useful means to know whether the learners follow the subject or not.

5. CONCLUSION

This research examined the teaching experience of three English lecturers in using L1 for the success of their language teaching in a university in Indonesia.

The result of the study shows that all three English lecturers generally use L1 in their teaching practice. Those lecturers decide to use L1 in some particular conditions to maximize the effectiveness of their teaching activities. L1 use seems to be a better solution when the students have a problem with their mood in the class. Although the priority is to use full English to maximize the target language exposure, the lecturer is aware of the potential negative effect if the learners are forced to involve in full English instruction while they are not fully in good mood.

L1 is also used when the lecturers explain difficult materials. Additionally, any concept that does not exist in the student's environment can be easily explained using L1. The next reason the English lecturers use L1 is to promote cross-cultural understanding by comparing the cultural aspects of the students' L1 and the target language.

The most prominent function of L1 use is to engage the lower proficiency students and the introverts in the classroom activities. As a result, they will have significant improvement in their motivation. It is also found that using L1 is effective to get closer with the students because it breaks a certain barrier of communication. More particularly when there are some shy and reluctant students in the class, allowing L1 use can improve their confidence to interact in the classroom. Lastly, the lecturers allow the use of L1 when the learners have a problem in their learning process. Moreover, when feedback from the students is really needed, the use of L1 is fully permissible.

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